

Always in Prayer

E. F. HALLOCK

Always in Prayer

E. F. HALLOCK

E F Hallock

Published by the author

622 S. Ponca

Norman, Oklahoma

John 15:1-7

*To my wife, Vera,
and my five children—
Edgar, Ardelle, Roger, Vera Beth, and Ann*

*whose Christian testimonies
have been basic in my ministry*

© 1966 - E. F. Hallock
All rights reserved
Fourth printing

Dewey Decimal classification: 248.3
Library of Congress catalog card number: 66-12572
Printed by Casa Bautista de Publicaciones
Box 4255 :-: El Paso, Texas
4 E 2 M 73

Contents

- 1 Transformed by Prayer . . . 7
- 2 What Is Prayer? . . . 15
- 3 Prayer—A Divine Imperative . . . 24
- 4 Prayerlessness . . . 32
- 5 Can God Do It? . . . 42
- 6 Prayer Unlimited Within God's Limits . . . 54
- 7 Stir Up Yourselves to Pray . . . 62
- 8 Behold Your God . . . 71
- 9 God's Search for a Man . . . 82
- 10 Sanctify Yourselves . . . 91
- 11 The Fatal Heresy . . . 100
- 12 They That Wait for the Lord . . . 108
- 13 My Times Are in Thy Hand . . . 119

1. Transformed by Prayer

In our home was a five-and-one-half-year-old son. From the time he had any understanding he had joined in the praying at family-altar time.

One morning, shortly after he had trusted Christ as Saviour, he startled me by his prayer. It was as usual for a part of it, but then he came forth with:

"Oh, God, please give me a little white dog and an electric train for Christmas."

In my mind I regretted his prayer immediately. I feared for the ill effect upon his faith when he would realize that God was not to be bothered with such things.

But I was the one who got the awakening.

That afternoon two boys from my Boy Scout troop appeared at our door.

"We have a little white dog," they said. "We live in an apartment house and we've got to give it away. Would you like it for Edgar?"

Of course it was accepted.

Edgar was playing across the street and knew nothing of this until he came home, walked into the kitchen, and saw the dog.

"Well," he said, "God sure answered my prayer in a hurry, didn't he?"

Forty years later Edgar prayed for a new press to print Bibles in Brazil. God led the American Bible Society to answer that prayer with a \$25,000 press.

From a little white dog to a \$25,000 press! Zechariah's word is appropriate. "Who hath despised the day of small things?" Surely not God!

Praying after the Bible pattern is a transforming activity. We believe that by prayer we work great changes in affairs and in persons. As we carry on our program of prayer, we are hardly aware that the greatest change is the one that is being wrought in us who pray.

All of us feel the importance of prayer and will argue for it theoretically. Our practice too often belies our theory. Just like the weather, we talk about it a great deal but do nothing about it. We cannot change the weather! We can change our prayer practice. We all have a desire to be better Christians; did we but realize that prayer changes us from better to best, we would probably give more time to it.

Understanding Prayer

Consistent praying transforms us in our understanding and use of prayer. We all begin by asking for things. When we become Christians, we are instructed to pray about everything, to talk with God as with a good friend. We are told that he is interested in the very least thing about us, that he cares for the sparrows, that the very hairs of our head are all numbered. This being so, we have no hesitancy in talking with God about what may be considered little and unimportant things.

But who can measure the value or the greatness of the size of anything? These little things to some people may seem foolish, but to the man who prays about all matters in his life there is nothing foolish before God.

It could be almost said that all of us begin at this place.

Once in a great while a man comes along like Charles G. Finney who received a mighty baptism of the Holy Spirit simultaneously with his conversion. Even before he realized it he had been converted, and before he understood what this experience with the Holy Spirit was, this man plunged into the big things of praying. Even so there are instances in his autobiography where he too prayed for the common and little things of life.

As a young Christian in my early teens, I prayed for everything from a lost baseball to the recovery of my baby brother whom the doctors had said could not live. So many and so interesting were the answers that God gave me about little things, that my faith grew, and I began to pray for things that were much bigger.

A beginner does not pray about things only; he also includes persons, especially those of his family and perhaps a few close friends. As he sees results for which he has prayed come to pass in these people, he is greatly encouraged to pray for those who may be just a little bit beyond this immediate circle. Without being aware of it, he is being transformed into an intercessor.

Intercessory prayer is a great field of service in itself. In this area the praying person prays for his family, for his friends, for his church related acquaintances, for his spiritual leaders. He begins to include a few missionaries whom he knows, and in the course of time he begins to pray for many, many missionaries by name, not knowing them personally, but confident that God does and that God will hear prayer offered in their behalf. He also includes people who are outside the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ, the lost people. He keeps a prayer list of these.

There comes a time when his faith is emboldened to pray even for nations. This faith is rooted in the words of the Lord in the book of Isaiah, "Behold, the nations are as a drop of a

bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance: behold, he taketh up the isles as a very little thing. . . . All nations before him are as nothing; and they are counted to him less than nothing, and vanity" (Isa. 40:15-17).

The transformation goes on even deeper. We are transformed until our hearts become heavy with an abiding concern. As we go about our duties, we find ourselves walking in the Lord's presence. Though we speak no words, our concern is a matter of thought and of our hearts' reactions. God reads our thoughts and the inarticulate cries of our souls.

The apostle Paul said, "I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart" (Rom. 9:2). In another place he wrote, "Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? who is offended, and I burn not" (2 Cor. 11:28-29)?

Nehemiah affords another wonderful illustration of this type of transformation. He was the king's cupbearer and should have been joyous; but he had heard news that Jerusalem was desolate and lying waste. He prayed much about it and with a heavy heart went in before the king to perform his duty as cupbearer. The king observed his countenance and said to him, "Why is your face sad, seeing you are not sick? This is nothing else but sadness of the heart" (Neh. 2:2, RSV). Then Nehemiah unburdened his soul to the king. The king appointed him governor and sent him back to rebuild his beloved city.

Prayer leads us ultimately to this stage of transformation. We are transformed by prayer until our hearts and our lives are suffused by the passion to do the will of God. Praying becomes an activity whose chief end is the constant and ever conscious pursuit of the Heavenly Father's will.

Jesus gave us the example of pursuing God's will. "My meat

is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work" (John 4:34). "I do always those things that please him" (John 8:29). And he taught us, "He that willeth to do his will shall know" (cf. John 7:17). Obedience to this will of God is the door that opens up the road ahead.

He leads us on step by step, and then there comes to our hearts the understanding, "[Our] times are in thy hand" (Psalm 31:15). We trust him.

Union with Christ

The transformation still goes on. We are changed, by praying, from the sense of human aloneness into a living experience of walking with the living Lord; it is a well-nigh unbroken fellowship with the Lord. This is mediated to us by Scripture. Jesus said in the Great Commission, "Lo, I am with you alway" (Matt. 28:20). And Paul's word becomes significant to us, "I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day" (2 Tim. 1:12). This fellowship is a union of heart with Jesus.

The story of an elderly Christian lady best says it for us all. Many, many years she had served the Lord and depended upon his faithfulness. A few months before her going to heaven, her pastor visited her. He said to her, "Auntie, suppose after all these years of faithful service, the Lord would let you slip through his fingers?" Her answer was quick, "He can't let me slip through his fingers. I am one of his fingers."

Jesus set forth the relationship that ought to be normal for every person who believes in him. In John 15 we have a beautiful picture of the vine and the branches. There he declares, "I am the true vine." The vine needs pruning and our Father is the one who does the pruning; we learn that we grow a lot of vine in a little while on our branch; that extra

vine must be cut off. The old vine doesn't bear good fruit. It is the new growth that produces the best grapes. Because we abide in him and he abides in us, we experience this process of being pruned and kept fruitful. I am in Christ. Christ is in me.

In this experience of his abiding presence, it is normal to pray without ceasing. This is a continuation of the transforming process; this we do not do as a beginner. This does not mean that we are on our knees all of the time or even sitting apart engaged in conscious acts of prayer every minute. It does mean that we are never out of touch so that at any moment we can say a word of prayer or several of them and know that we are being heard, whether we are walking or driving or lying awake at night, or whatever the situation may be. Even in a crowded room we can be in touch with our Heavenly Father.

As the reality of our growing relationship deepens, thanksgivings and praises multiply in our outgoing toward God. Many times during the days, events happen, big or little, and immediately there rise to our lips the words, "Thank you, Father." This is a glad and joyful overflowing of this whole process of being transformed by prayer. Prayer transforms us into grateful persons.

Because we have been transformed into grateful persons, we can be agreeable to Paul's word to the Ephesians, "Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Eph. 5:20). In an earlier epistle, 1 Thessalonians 5:18, he had written, "In every thing give thanks." But to give thanks "for everything" is a real test of one's confidence and faith in God. Being transformed into grateful persons also enables us to have a growing faith that God works all things together for good to them that love him.

This transformation that has enabled us to enter into the

experience of union with Christ—that is, as a branch of the vine—makes available to us his unerring guidance. We need not make mistakes in following God's path. If we do, we are out of touch with him. It may be that we are in touch with him but stubborn. In Psalm 32:8-9 he says, "I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye. Be ye not as the horse, or as the mule, which have no understanding: whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle, lest they come near unto thee." The American Standard Version translates this first verse, "I will counsel thee with mine eye upon thee." And David said in Psalm 16:7, "I will bless the Lord, who hath given me counsel." And the Lord speaking through Isaiah (30:21), said, "And thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left."

In His Image

Transformed into abiding in him through prayer, it becomes increasingly difficult to think evil, to speak critically, to be jealous, to do wrong of any kind. It becomes normal to love the good and to do the right. A student from a foreign land was irked by the signs on the campus, "Keep Off the Grass." He said, "At first those signs made me want to walk on the grass. But I came to know and to love the president of that university, and one day as I walked along, irked by those signs, I thought, 'This is my president's grass'; and that made all the difference in the world; and I learned to love to stay off of it."

Prayer transforms us about praying. We still pray for little things as long as we live, but perhaps accept them as already accomplished without much praying. We pray for people near and far, and we pray until we enter into fellowship with our praying Lord.

By prayer the transformation changes our character, and we realize that his words are becoming not just commandments but fulfilments within us. He said, "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you" (John 13:34). And this becomes not just an ideal but an experience.

The beatitudes no longer are mere challenges to be, but they become being. Trusting God is so in our character that we learn to accept without question Jesus' quotation from Deuteronomy, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Matt. 4:4). We learn to take as fact his statement in John 15:7, "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you."

By way of summary, we are transformed by prayer (1) in our understanding and practice of prayer; (2) in our cultivated, conscious union with Christ; (3) in growing into his image, his likeness, his character. Then we may ask what we will, because even our will to ask has been transformed so that we will to ask only what he wills.

At Ridgecrest I heard S. D. Gordon say, "Whenever God can reach down and do whatever he pleases with me, then I can reach up and do whatever I please with God." And that is true because God trusts us since we have been transformed into trustworthiness and into likeness to his Son.

2. What Is Prayer?

All that needs to be spoken or written about prayer is in the Bible.

God's Book is indispensable. It speaks plainly about prayer and about praying men. It relates their history. It gives the results of their prayers. Many times these results are so magnificent that we are stunned as we think of what God was able to do because men prayed.

There is no theorizing about prayer in the Bible. There are no sermons about prayer in the Bible, and there is no definition of prayer in the Bible. Praying is assumed as one thing that men must do. There are invitations and exhortations to pray. There are commands from God to pray. The Bible is permeated by prayer.

Three things about prayer are set up in the Bible. Prayer is our approach to God. Prayer is God's approach to us. Prayer is receiving from God what he has inspired us to ask.

Approaching God

James tells us, "Draw nigh to God" (4:8). When we turn our thoughts toward him, whether we kneel or sit or walk or ride, we are drawing nigh to God. Yet, too often our praying is mechanical. Prayer is more than duty and more than mere practice. Sometimes people think of it as their spiritual calisthenics, their setting up exercises to keep their

hearts in trim before God. But a great fact about prayer that we need to consider is that we are approaching the eternal God.

Moses went up into the mountain unto God. He did not go up in the mountain just to carry out a religious function, but to meet Jehovah, the God who had called him and with whom he had walked through the days of his banishment in Horeb. God was there, and Moses went to approach him.

In Exodus 33 a tent of meeting is spoken about, and we are told that Moses set this tent of meeting outside the camp. This is not the tabernacle because it was set in the midst of the camp with the tribes on every side. Moses' tent was outside the camp. There he met God.

Our prayer place is our meeting tent, and we should go there often. The Lord said to Jeremiah (29:12-13), "Then shall ye call upon me, and ye shall go and pray unto me, and I will hearken unto you. And ye shall seek me, and find me when ye shall search for me with all your heart." Jeremiah knew that prayer is approaching the Lord, and he practiced it.

Jesus taught us that prayer is going to God. He did this by word and example. He said, "When ye pray, say, Our Father" (Luke 11:2). What more direct and simple statement that prayer is approaching God could be spoken? Every exhortation and command of Jesus to pray is an urge from him to us to go to our Father and kneel and pray before him.

The great apostle Paul said, "Let your requests be made known unto God" (Phil. 4:6). The most poignant need of every one of us who prays is that we shall be aware of God as we come to prayer time.

We approach God to give him our thanks, and this should be sincere and from the heart. We approach God in order to worship him. We approach God to ask from him the things that we think we need and the things that we know he wants us to have. We approach God to ask on behalf of others, to

seek his will from him in person, to ask that he open the eyes of our hearts, to seek him in his Word.

This is the familiar thing in prayer. When we preach on prayer, when we read about prayer, when we encourage people to pray, the dominant thing in the minds of all concerned is that we are going to God to seek him, to find what he wants us to do, to get things from him for ourselves, for others, for his work, for his glory. In other words, for almost all people prayer is simply going to God, and that ends it.

But that does not end it. That is only a fraction of prayer. There is another side to all this, and this is that prayer is not only our approach to him but also God's approach to us.

He Approaches Us

Nearly all of our praying is like a one-way telephone conversation. We dial a number; we hear a voice respond on the other end; then, for ten minutes we stand there and pour into the telephone what is on our minds and in our hearts. Before the person on the other end has opportunity to respond, we hang up the phone. The conversation is over. It has not been a conversation at all. It has been an explosion on our part to a person on the other end who did not have opportunity to say one word in return. Most praying is like that. We talk and talk and never wait for God to speak; in fact, we seldom consider whether God has anything to say or not.

We need to remember that God is on the line. The amazing fact is that he is the one who made the call to start with. We would never have approached him had he not called us. Then, and only then, did we turn our minds to talk to him. Is this not what Paul is saying in Romans 8:26-27? "Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession

for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God."

The Old Testament marvelously demonstrates the proposition that prayer is God's approach to us. The first five books of the Bible have 187 chapters. In 139 of those chapters we see God approaching man, and this is the all-important side of prayer; without it there could be no real Christian praying. God came to Adam in the Garden of Eden. God spoke to Cain after he had murdered his brother Abel. God came to Noah, to Abraham. He came to Moses again and again. Surely all these were men of prayer, but we are not told that they were men of prayer. We are made to see how God came to them and how they responded. We are not presented with a picture of men on their knees, but of men listening to the eternal God as he unveiled his will, his mind to them.

A vivid illustration of this is in Exodus 33:17—34:8. Moses had implored God to make himself known to him anew, and God said to Moses that there was a place in the rock where he could stand while God passed by. God did pass by, and Moses knew that God once more had renewed within him that controlling, all-consuming vision that his life and work so much needed.

This was true with Joshua, Gideon, Samuel. It was true of Isaiah in that great vision when Isaiah said, "In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord" (Isa. 6:1). It is true of Jeremiah and Ezekiel and all the prophets. God came to them, and their praying was a response to God's touch upon them.

When we turn to the New Testament, we discover that God has come down to us in human form. Paul expressed this for us vividly in Philippians 2:5-6 when he said, "Have this mind among yourselves, which you have in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with

God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men" (RSV). God came down to us in this marvelous approach to human beings. And because of this approach of God in Christ to us, we in turn are constrained to turn toward God and set before him our petitions. Were this not true, it is possible that we never would approach God, and therefore, we ought to be extremely grateful that our God has come to us.

Another way of thinking about this is that, as a servant of the Lord carries the message to a lost man, the Holy Spirit is there with that man, opening his mind, instructing his heart, giving him the conviction that he ought to do something about it. He opens his heart, and the Lord comes in. At the same time, the Holy Spirit takes up his dwelling in him. From this time on, every movement to pray is a touch of God's Spirit.

As we pray about God's work and what he wants us to do, it is God who works in us "to will" and "to do for his good pleasure." Plans for the work, ideas for getting it done—all these things are from God. How we need to understand this and let God have free access to our hearts and thus acknowledge his coming. Our prayer will then become effective.

Mr. Spurgeon, a man who knew what it was to prevail with God in prayer, said one time, "When God intends great blessings for his people he sets them to praying." When we are moved to urge and exhort people to pray, let us remember that it is God who is exhorting and urging through us. He is setting us to pray that he may give us great blessing. Recognizing this truth and making it known is a sort of praise that we owe to God. It is praise that will keep us humble and turn us away from the paths of pride that destroy our spirituality.

In the light of this truth that God approaches us, we can use a familiar couplet of verses as a basis of expecting an answer to prayer. Jesus said in Matthew 18:19-20, "That if two of you

shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven." We stop right there, but he didn't say that and leave it there. He said something else that must go with it, or the answer cannot come. "For," said he, "where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." When two are in agreement with him, they are in perfect agreement with each other, and the answer is as sure as though it were already here.

This conception that prayer is God's approach to us is a transforming thing, and we need to face it constantly as we think about prayer and as we pray.

Ask and Receive

When we recognize and understand that prayer is God's approach to us and our approach to God, we are in an attitude of heart to understand this third thing, that prayer is receiving. It is not only an act of faith, but it is faith in action.

Jesus in Mark 11:24 said, "What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them." In the original language, the Greek word "receive" is in the aorist tense. That is, it was a thing done at a particular point, not a thing to be done in the future, so that it could properly read, "Believe that ye *received* them."

This is not the common temper of prayer. Too much praying is asking and then hoping that we are going to get what we have asked for. And halfheartedly, halfway in faith, we wait for an answer that never comes. We didn't expect to get it and had no faith that we had gotten it. But, if you understand that prayer is God's approach to you, and you recognize it as such, and if you have approached God to ask as you have been inspired to do, then you can be confident that the answer has been given. John must have meant this when he wrote in 1 John 5:14-15, "And this is the confidence that we

have in him, that, if we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us: And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him." One who understands this will be obedient to Jesus' injunction to use not "vain repetitions." We are not heard for our much speaking. We are heard because our prayers have been prompted by God himself, and we come in the name and in the will of our Lord Jesus Christ.

There are people who, when they pray, come with a request and somehow feel that for the first time God is being informed concerning this matter. Really, they are thinking that they will surprise God with what they are about to say. They are sure that God has never thought about this thing before. This kind of praying is not praying at all.

Again, there are people who think that they must come with determination and untiring vigor because they must persuade an unwilling God to do the thing that they are about to ask him. This too is not true. Because a thing may be slow in coming, it does not indicate that God is unwilling. It may mean that there is still a little thing in our lives that must be moved to make room for the receiving of what God has already started on its way.

Prayer is receiving the Lord whom you seek. The Lord said to Jeremiah, "Ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart" (Jer. 29:13). A knock at my door causes me to open it. I invite the knocker in, and I receive him into my home. Jesus stands at my door every time I go to pray. He knocks, I open and receive him into my life.

Prayer is receiving what God has promised. It is asking, knocking, seeking, but unless we receive (and this is an act of faith on our part), then the asking, knocking, and seeking are in vain. We must learn to look up and with open arms receive what God has promised.

We receive his plans. Ideas come to us as we pray. We write

them down, and then we move forward in the performance of these things that we have received.

Perhaps above all, prayer is receiving by letting God carry out the work. Paul said, "It is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure" (Phil. 2:13). We understand this first part better than we do the last. It is God who does the work as well as works into us these ideas, and to receive God's working is a major part of our praying.

Of course, prayer is receiving the gift we requested. If we know it is God's will that we have it and we are assured that it is in his promises, then we can wait because we know it is coming. We have already received it, and in God's time it will be present with us. We no longer continue to ask for it. We simply thank God for it and wait on his goodness. Sometimes we fail to do this, and we start asking again, and we pray ourselves out of faith. We must learn that prayer is receiving the gifts we have asked for.

Prayer is receiving God's promised providence. This is an area that is exceedingly broad. "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want" (Psalm 23:1). If this word of God could become the essence of our faith, we would be above all worry and all anxiety. Jesus expands this thought in Matthew 6:25-33 (RSV) where he tells us, "Do not be anxious. . . . Look at the birds . . . your heavenly Father feeds them. . . . Consider the lilies . . . even Solomon . . . was not arrayed like one of these." And then he says, "Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well." Proverbs 3:5 says, "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart." This we need to know and practice because prayer is receiving the providences of God that have already been promised.

In Psalm 81:10 the Lord says, "Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it." It is said that in ancient days an Oriental monarch, wishing to reward one of his nobles for worthy deeds

accomplished, in a very special time would call that man into his presence before all the other nobles. Then he would ask him to open his mouth wide, and tip his head back so that the monarch could fill that man's mouth with precious stones of every kind. That is what our Heavenly Father says to us when we come to pray. "Open your mouth wide in prayer, and I will fill it."

Prayer then is three things: our approach to God; God's approach to us; and third, our receiving him and all he plans for us through our prayers.

3. Prayer —

A Divine Imperative

Many paths open daily before us. All of them are attractive and offer much of interest and worth. We cannot enter all of them; we must make a choice.

We narrow our choices to those which we think are more important. This does not end our choice making; for among these there are those that are labeled "best," "excellent," or "superlative." These are of such character and value that we seriously impair our spiritual welfare by treating them lightly. By choosing carefully and making the most of them, we assure ourselves of victory.

The paths of Bible reading and prayer are given us to walk by divine imperative.

We do not walk these two paths very far until we discover that they are but one and indivisible.

I want to emphasize the prayer side of the path.

I offer three reasons in support of the claim that prayer is a divine imperative:

1. *God has commanded his people to pray.*
2. *God desires fellowship with us through prayer.*
3. *God promises everything to those who pray in the name of Jesus.*

There are many statements from the heart of God concerning prayer that are imperative in their nature and meaning.

Biblical Evidence

The Lord said to Jeremiah, "Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and shew thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not" (Jer. 33:3). This word looses upon us a double sense of urgency. There is in it both a command and a promise.

"Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near" (Isa. 55:6). This command warns us that we may wait too long to seek the Lord and to call upon him. But "Ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart" (Jer. 29:13). To find him and to know him is the answer we most desire.

"Call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me" (Psalm 50:15). When trouble befalls us, we may be overwhelmed by it. Just to be reminded of this commandment enables one to turn his heart toward God.

In the New Testament, from both Jesus and his apostles, come words that bear the powerful imperative of the commandment. Recognizing Jesus' faithful practice of praying, we realize that anything he says about prayer bears the stamp of urgency. When he says "When ye pray," that is equivalent to "pray ye." His teaching in Matthew 6:5-15 is as near being the central teaching on prayer as anything in the Bible. It, in itself, is in the nature of the imperative.

One of Jesus' commandments is, "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you" (Matt. 7:7). Like so many other commands to pray, linked with this one is the confident promise of answer. In fact, all commands to pray are linked with a promise.

"And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint" (Luke 18:1). Then

Jesus tells of a wicked and unrighteous judge who cared not for God or man. A widow sought just protection against an adversary. To relieve himself—not to serve justice—he granted her a favorable decision. By contrast, God is righteous and loving. He will answer, although the answer is sometimes delayed. Within this teaching is the imperative urgency of the Lord's command.

"Pray for them which despitefully use you." This must be linked with "love your enemies." The two, no doubt, go together; for if one will truly pray for his enemies, he has already expressed one of the best proofs of love. He is becoming like his Lord who prayed on the cross, "Father, forgive them."

Look at one or two words from the apostle Paul. "Pray without ceasing" (1 Thess. 5:17). "Continue steadfastly in prayer" (Col. 4:2, RSV). Many times he must have encouraged and urged upon his churches and their members the great necessity to pray.

To Timothy he wrote, "I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men. . . . This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth. . . . I will therefore that men pray every where, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting" (1 Tim. 2:1-8).

What could be more imperative than these words of the apostle? He plainly says that God wants all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth and that the success of God's will toward the reaching of lost men with the gospel message is conditioned on the imperative that "men pray everywhere." Compassion for lost men deepens the urgency of these powerful words of Paul.

Failure is tragic sin. "To him therefore that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin" (James 4:17).

Fellowship with God

Prayer, in the second place, is a divine imperative because God desires fellowship with his redeemed children. When we begin to try to lift this thought we stagger beneath its great weight.

God, the Eternal One; God, the Majestic One; God, the Infinite Father desires fellowship with those who have been purchased by the blood of his Son.

A king demands and exacts obedience. A president of a republic requires allegiance. The head of a great corporation demands results. None of these seek human fellowship with those whom they govern.

But God seeks fellowship with the least of his blood-bought children. In so doing he lifts us from our low earthly plane to "heavenly places in Christ."

Throughout the Bible we see God seeking the fellowship of men. When they go their rebellious ways and break the fellowship, he seeks them out and mends it.

In the Garden of Eden there was unbroken fellowship and man was not afraid; but when Adam exalted himself and chose his own way, he lost fellowship with God and was afraid.

Then there was Enoch. Of him it is written, "And Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took him" (Gen. 5:24). One can easily imagine that these walks with God were very important, both to God and to Enoch, and especially was this an imperative with Enoch, that he not miss his appointment with God.

Then, when "the earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence" (Gen. 6:11), God had a man ready. He had had fellowship with him a long time. Now when it became necessary to destroy man because of his corruption and violence, God had Noah ready to be the preacher of

redemption. He knew that man because he had had fellowship with him.

God informed him and charged him what to do. He was to build the ark for deliverance, then to preach safety and salvation in the ark for those who believed. He built on and on and continued to preach. None of those who heard him were converted, at least there are no conversions recorded. Noah must have felt great discouragement. In such times he turned to the Lord. This divine fellowship sustained him through those 120 years, and Noah never lost sight of the imperative necessity of prayer.

What a beautiful expression of the fact that prayer is a divine imperative is manifested in the record of fellowship which Abraham had with the Lord. From Ur of Chaldees to the time of the offering up of Isaac, the Lord appeared to him between nine and twelve times. This could have been over a stretch of fifty years, but who would say that he did not have deep fellowship with God in between those appearances?

Then, there was Moses. His parents implanted a deep, abiding faith in the heart of that child. God knew what and how he was to serve in years to come, and he watched over Moses. "By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter" (Heb. 11:24). Even in the Egyptian palace Moses knew that prayer was his personal imperative if he was to maintain fellowship with God; and all the years proved it. His last forty years are a telecast in divine colors.

God sought out many other men, among whom were Joshua, Gideon, David, Isaiah, Amos, Jeremiah, and the prophets. But fellowship with the Lord was not confined to those men who were special servants. Many of the common people must have known communion. The fellowship of God was higher than earthly values, and they knew that the gateway into that fellowship was prayer.

But the full manifestation of God's desire for our fellowship is seen in the coming of his Son, himself God. And Jesus Christ both showed and taught how imperative it is that men pray always.

Since God desires our fellowship then it is unquestionably urgent that we seek him in prayer. Through Amos he said, "Seek ye me, and ye shall live" (Amos 5:4). And we must answer, "Thy face Lord will I seek." Our fellowship with God is expressed in our hearts' worship of him, and our hearts' worship of God is all important to growth in Christlikeness and service in his name.

"We are labourers together with God," not laborers together with each other but with God. What a fellowship in service we have! Until now, these two reasons make the imperative urgent and impressive; but everyone who desires to succeed in the Lord's work knows how urgent it becomes when we realize that prayer is a divine imperative because of what God promises to do for those who pray. Whenever such a word as "whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son" (John 14:13) comes to a child of God, he is made to stop and realize that here is something divinely extraordinary.

And what shall we think of this word of Jesus: "And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive" (Matt. 21:22)? What will we *do* with such a generous promise?

God Promises All

As we consider Jesus' statements, we discover that prayer is a great imperative beyond the commandment. To many persons this imperative is more compelling than that of God seeking our fellowship. We are made to face the poverty of prayerlessness set over against the abundance that God offers to him who prays in faith and in the name of Jesus. The

abundance of God is conditioned by our surrender to the name and to its complete control of our lives.

If I am to do God's work, I need God's equipment. I need God's wisdom and God's power. God comes to me on the pavement of my prayers to make me able for his appointed tasks.

In our world men build great buildings, great dams across great rivers, great multiple-lane highways. To do these super-human tasks they create and perfect amazing machinery. With these machines and with skilled men, plus excellent materials and methods, they erect in months what our fathers, a half-century ago, would have said could not be done at all.

No builder ever faces such difficulties as those which face the servants of God. There are no machines, no man-made methods that can perform God's work. But God promises all that is needed.

Jesus gave us the work to be done in the Great Commission. He declares, "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations . . . and, lo, I am with you" (Matt. 28:18-20).

For more than nineteen centuries Christians have gone forth on this mission. Their zeal and their obedience, as well as their success, have been hot and cold, so that even now hardly a fourth of the world's population can be reckoned as much more than nominally Christian.

There are other seemingly insurmountable obstacles which confront us. One is the population growth of the unbelieving. The unbelievers are increasing faster than we can make believers. The number of missionaries increases, but the population grows much faster.

The nationalistic religions have awakened and are bestirring themselves through their national ambitions and have set themselves in opposition to Christianity. The progress of Christ's kingdom has been slowed.

Political ideologies have closed the doors of great nations that formerly were wide open, and in many of these countries where the doors are open, we still have no missionaries.

Our own nation is obsessed with the problem not only of maintaining a high level of prosperity, but of expanding it. Men are so consumed in the pursuit of greater material advancement that their minds are dead to spiritual approaches.

Our churches have become highly organized and efficient. The preacher and his staff are looked upon as promoters and administrators. We seem able to keep the wheels turning, but we scarcely move from where we are. We reach the people enrolled in our Sunday School, but not beyond that.

In the face of these and many more problems, we have grown problem-conscious. We have lost consciousness of divine power. If we will only believe God and make ourselves fully available to him through prayer, we will make progress in performing our world mission. Otherwise, it is an impossible and all but futile undertaking.

The "all power" that is given to Jesus is his to give to us when we learn what it means to pray in his name. He said, "I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing" (John 15:5). He also said, "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you" (John 15:7).

God sets before us the imperative to pray, to pray without ceasing. To pray and not give up! To obey is ours. If we comply with his will, we shall find ourselves enabled beyond our highest hopes. If we refuse to obey our Heavenly Father, in performing his imperative, we sentence ourselves to weakness, fruitlessness, and failure.

"It is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure" (Phil. 2:13).

4. Prayerlessness

Samuel was God's answer to Hannah's prayer. While he was still a child, he was given to the Lord and his home was the tabernacle. Upon the death of Eli, the high priest, he became judge, prophet, and priest of Israel. For many years he served as God's ruling servant in this land. He was born in prayer, and himself was a man of prayer.

When he was old, he made his sons judges over Israel. These sons walked not in the ways of their father, "but turned aside after lucre, and took bribes, and perverted judgment" (1 Sam. 8:3).

Thereupon, the elders of Israel came to Samuel and asked him to give them a king like the other nations had. Samuel was unhappy about this and prayed unto the Lord, and the Lord said to do as they asked. After the king was established on his throne, Samuel called the people together and rehearsed the history of Israel. He told the people they had done wrong in asking for a king. They admitted it and asked him to pray for them and Samuel said to them, "Moreover as for me, God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you" (1 Sam. 12:23).

Samuel recognized that prayerlessness is sin and that it is sin without extenuating circumstances. It is utterly inexcusable. There is no reason why any of God's children should be prayerless.

None of us is perfect. Not one of us can say, "I am pure. There is no spot of wrong thinking within me. There is no blemish of selfish pride. There is no bad attitude in my heart." We acknowledge that we are sinners, but sinners saved by grace. Many may have done well in keeping the Ten Commandments; nevertheless, we all admit that we are guilty of much wrongdoing—guilty of the sins of the heart and of the spirit, the sins of pride, indifference, and carelessness. These silently creep upon us unaware, and we may not feel deeply responsible for them.

But there is a sin which is wickedness of a far-reaching kind. It is the sin of ceasing or failing to pray according as God has pleaded with us and commanded us.

Sin Against God

First, let us think about prayerlessness as sin against God. Sin is not just the breaking of the law or the violation of God's commandments. To think of sin chiefly in this way is to lose the real aspect of it. Sin is against God the person. It is a rejection of his words and purposes, rebellion against his will and his government. Therefore, sin is rebellion and disobedience against God.

God has plainly said that it is his will that men pray. Jesus expressed this when he said, "Men ought always to pray, and not to faint" (Luke 18:1). The Bible is full of plain, simple, understandable commandments and teachings that it is God's will that men make contact with him and keep that contact unbroken, that there may be communication between the Father and his children. If there is any manifestation anywhere of what God's will is, it is in this matter of prayer.

There are commandments that are indirect and by way of implication; and there are commandments that are direct and to the point.

God gave Adam and Eve just one commandment. So long as

they observed that one, there was no need for others. This one commandment expressed fully and completely the will and mind of God for these two people and for the human race. That commandment was that they were to refrain from eating the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Then came Satan and pitted his will against God's will. He put before Adam and Eve his wisdom as being superior to that of the Lord, and the act of Adam and Eve was not an act that consisted merely in the breaking of a rule, but in the rejection of a person. This is true in the final analysis of all sin.

This is particularly true concerning the sin of prayerlessness. Prayer is the act on our part of coming to God. We approach God with our petitions and direct ourselves to him. Prayer also is God's coming to us. He approaches us and we receive what God has brought to us. Thus prayer is a relationship personally established on God's part with us, and when we refuse to enter into this relationship we manifest a serious spirit of rebellion.

The prophet Jeremiah had had a very difficult ministry, rebuking and threatening the destruction of Judah because of her sins. The Babylonian army had encircled the city, and the fall of Jerusalem was imminent. In that stage of the situation God instructed Jeremiah to buy property. Jeremiah questioned Jehovah about this matter and said there was no point in it since Jerusalem was about to be taken and destroyed. God then revealed to him that Judah would return and that property would once again be bought and sold. This looked impossible, but the Lord spoke to Jeremiah again while he was shut up in prison and said, "Thus saith the Lord the maker thereof, the Lord that formed it, to establish it; the Lord is his name; call unto me, and I will answer thee, and shew thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not" (Jer. 33:2-3). God makes it plain that Jeremiah is to pray for

the time to come when the people of Judah shall be restored to their land. To refuse God's command here would be a sin against his purposes for the future.

The prophet Isaiah pled earnestly with the people of Israel to pray. He said to them, "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near" (Isa. 55:6). This was a plain command through the prophet to the people to get themselves in touch with the Lord through prayer in order that the Lord might change their thoughts, pardon their sins, and make them fruitful in his kingdom. Again, failure to pray would have been plain disobedience and sin.

The words of Jesus in Matthew 7:7-8 are such clear commandments that they cannot be ignored or avoided. None can plead ignorance as he listens to these words, "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened." If righteousness is keeping the commandments, then unrighteousness and iniquity is rejecting the commandments.

Again, in a parable our Lord said that men ought always to pray and not to faint, and by implication he commands us when he says, "Whatsoever ye pray and ask for, believe that ye receive them and ye shall have them" (Mark 11:24).

And surely we have a God-given commandment expressed by the apostle Paul as he writes to his son in the gospel, Timothy. He writes, "I exhort therefore, that first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; . . . I will therefore that men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting" (1 Tim. 2:1, 8).

To refuse to hear these words of the Lord is to rebel against him. God's injunctions concerning prayer are plain. Prayerlessness is a sin against God and it is sin that can find no excuse.

Again, prayerlessness is a sin against God because it is an act of distrust. Trust is that attitude of the soul that links us in deep, abiding fellowship with our Heavenly Father; but, when we refuse to pray, we break that trust and sin against God.

God has promised abundance. He conditions our receiving this abundance upon our simple, believing prayer to him in the name of the Lord Jesus.

All of us deeply desire all that God has promised, but how few there are that trust the truthfulness of God. God says, "Open thy mouth wide and I will fill it" (Psalm 81:10). But men sit idly by and refuse to act. This is distrust that has no excuse save refusal to recognize the greatness and love of God.

Distrust is born of ignorance of his promises, and that ignorance is inexcusable, because the Word of God, the Bible, is in our hands; and men have told us again and again of its glorious promises about prayer and of God's desire to share with us the wealth of the world.

Consider this word of God to Jeremiah concerning prayer. "Then shall ye call upon me, and ye shall go and pray unto me, and I will hearken unto you. And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart" (Jer. 29:12-13). In these verses the great search is for the God who promises to show himself to our hearts when we search for him with all the heart. Surely, we cannot turn away from this desire to meet and to know God. To do so is to count God of no consequence, and surely that is sin.

Consider again the set of promises in Psalm 91:14-16: "Because he hath set his love upon me, therefore will I deliver him: I will set him on high, because he hath known my name. He shall call upon me, and I will answer him: I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and honour him. With long life will I satisfy him, and shew him my salvation."

In these verses the great, eternal, loving God offers to that man who loves him these marvelous blessings. These are

blessings for which we would pay richly if we could; but they are offered to us upon the condition of our love for God and our calling upon him. Not to call upon the Lord in response to these great promises is like throwing a million-dollar gift back into the face of a loving giver—a dreadful sin.

There are many such promises and commandments, both direct and indirect, and all of them magnify the possibility of this prayer-relationship between child and Heavenly Father. To fail here, to ignore the Lord in this matter, is plain disobedience and we walk a path of thorns.

Distrust is sin. God said concerning Israel when they turned their backs upon him at Kadesh-Barnea, "How long will it be ere this people believe in me?" And he turned them back into a wilderness of wandering for thirty-nine years.

Prayerlessness is sin against God because in the mind and will of God his work goes forward on our knees. Isn't that what he says in 2 Chronicles 7:14? "If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land." Always, everywhere the work of God has waited on the prayers of the people. Only God can do these great things that he wants done and only by our prayers can he act. Not to pray is to defeat God's purpose, and this is sin for which there is no excuse. Forgiveness, yes, but no excuse. When we do not pray, we work against God.

Finally, prayerlessness is sin against God because it destroys the channel through which our thankfulness flows up to him. All of us owe the sacrifice of thanksgiving to God constantly. So much so that the apostle Paul wrote, "In every thing give thanks" (1 Thess. 5:18). And another time, "Giving thanks to God in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ for everything" (cf. Eph. 5:20). When we become thankful we become sinners against God and man.

As thanksgiving goes out the doors of our lives, other sins troop in, and we find ourselves indeed sinning against God.

Sin Against Men

When men pray, they change men and nations. In Isaiah 40:15,17 Isaiah said, "Behold, the nations are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance: behold, he taketh up the isles as a very little thing. All nations before him are as nothing; and they are counted to him less than nothing, and vanity."

In the passage already quoted from 1 Timothy 2, Paul urges prayer that men might be changed. Great men of prayer have demonstrated how others are changed by intercessory prayer. David Brainerd prayed in the wilderness of New York. Brainerd went to work among the Indians of the forests of New York back in colonial days. He was a young man of exceedingly poor health but tremendous devotion to God. His ministry was a ministry of intercessory prayer. It is said of him that he prayed kneeling in the snow until his body was wet with sweat. He had to preach through an interpreter and often times through an interpreter that was drunk on whiskey; but the Holy Spirit fell on the Indians in that area and many of them came to know the Lord in a salvation experience.

John Hyde, known better as "Praying Hyde of India," is another illustration of one whose prayers changed men and movements. His life and work manifest the miraculous power that is available through dedicated intercessory prayer. He was in his forty-fifth year when he began to pray that the Lord would give him in the year ahead one soul for Christ every day, and in due time God made him aware that thus it would be. During the year that followed he won more than one soul a day. Then he prayed that he might win two a day for the year following, and God granted that prayer by giving him more than two a day. In the last year of his life he was

praying for four souls a day when he was stricken and died at the age of forty-seven. Through prayer God used him mightily to change the lives of men.

Through our praying we give the Holy Spirit a chance to use the word of God to convict sinners. Through our prayers he continues this work until their hearts and minds are enlightened as to the way of salvation, and they turn to the Lord and receive him. Not to pray for men is to sin against them and to sentence them to eternal death. What sin could be worse than that?

By prayer Jesus said we could thrust forth laborers into the harvest. Listen to him as he speaks in Matthew 9:36-38, "When he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd. Then saith he unto his disciples, The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few; pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest." This being true, we have sinned against the harvest of souls by failing to pray the Lord for laborers; and it is evident that prayerlessness has produced a great lack of workers. This is sin against men over the world.

Prayerlessness is sin against people because it holds back revival. People of all ages sink deeper and deeper into the quicksand of sin and death. By prayer revival comes. This is the testimony both of the Scriptures and of history.

There are ample illustrations among the churches down through the ages that, when men cease to pray, the churches grow lifeless and fruitless; but, when men pray, the churches become alive, and the Holy Spirit of God falls upon men and they turn to God in faith and salvation.

Prayerlessness leaves the treasury of God's storehouse locked, and the people perish because there is no money with which to send the gospel. Zechariah 4:6 says: "This is the word of the Lord unto Zerubbabel, saying, Not by might, nor

by power, but by my spirit saith the Lord of hosts." Prayer brings the Holy Spirit into action in the ministry of money within the churches of God, and failure to pray leaves the church poverty-stricken and unable to carry forward its program. This is sin against people.

Prayerlessness is without doubt the cause of worldliness in the churches. It is a fact that praying pastors have less worldliness in their churches than pastors who spend their time in things of social interest, but neglect the greatest of all values, the matter of prayer. Every pastor of us ought to feel a deep sense of guilt that we pray so little and allow Satan to create so much deadly worldliness among our members. We can change that if we will give ourselves to prayer.

Sin Against Oneself

Not only is prayerlessness sin against God and against people, but it is sin against oneself. When you do not pray, you cut off the flow of the Holy Spirit's almighty power into and through you. True it is that as a child of God redeemed by the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit is in you; but prayerlessness shuts out his power. Everyone knows that when the Holy Spirit has access to a man's heart, then that man is used by the Holy Spirit. So prayerlessness is sin against oneself and his utility for the kingdom of God.

Prayerlessness stunts potential growth. Prayer is like the enriched soil in which flowers and trees and grains produce abundantly. But when prayer dies out, one does not grow, and where he should have been a giant, he is a pygmy.

Prayerlessness dooms one to spiritual poverty—poverty in understanding the ways of God; poverty in understanding the work of God; poverty in influencing the lives of others. We live for these things, and to be poor in prayer is to be poor in everything.

Prayerlessness is sin against oneself because it is rebellious

unbelief. Rebellious unbelief destroys. It is suicide not to pray, and suicide is dreadful sin.

If we who preach the word were convinced and would accept the testimony of God's Word that prayerlessness is a heinous sin, a sin of rebellion, unbelief, and distrust, we surely would turn ourselves about and change the world by prayer.

Men who shrink from stealing from their neighbors, from cheating in a business deal, from committing immoral acts, from robbing God of his tithe; men who would not commit murder, rob a bank, nor knowingly commit acts that are considered sin, yet will be guilty of this worst of sins. The act of righteousness which would cleanse the hearts of the praying person and of the persons prayed for is neglected and ignored, and we settle down into indifference.

Jesus said, "Men ought always to pray" (Luke 18:1). Let us confess our sin in this matter and with deep sincerity dedicate ourselves to this greatest of all works, the work of intercessory prayer.

5. Can God Do It?

In the second month of the second year after the Israelites came out of Egypt, they left Mt. Sinai and journeyed three days toward the Promised Land. During encampment the people murmured concerning the lack of certain kinds of food.

“The anger of the Lord was kindled greatly; Moses also was displeased” (Num. 11:10).

Moses chided the Lord because he had laid upon him the burden of this people and he asked the Lord, “Whence should I have flesh to give unto all this people? . . . I am not able to bear all this people alone” (Num. 11:13-14).

Moses then asked God to take his life.

The Lord replied that he would give the people flesh to eat and that they should eat not one day, nor two, nor five, nor ten, nor twenty, but a whole month until it became loathsome to them.

“And Moses said, The people, among whom I am, are six hundred thousand footmen; and thou hast said, I will give them flesh, that they may eat a whole month” (Num. 11:21). Moses expressed a very grave doubt as to the ability of God to provide. “And the Lord said unto Moses, Is the Lord’s hand waxed short? thou shalt see now whether my word shall come to pass unto thee or not” (Num. 11:23).

The Lord kept his word and brought meat.

Another illustration of the Lord's keeping his word was in the closing days of Nebuchadnezzar's siege of Jerusalem. For forty years Jeremiah had predicted destruction if the people did not return to the Lord. His words were about to see fulfilment. The Babylonian armies had besieged the city for several months; starvation had weakened the Jewish soldiers and people; surrender was imminent.

At that point, the Lord told Jeremiah to buy his uncle's land. Jeremiah remonstrated. He prayed to the Lord saying that he understood that the Lord was great, that he had made the heavens and the earth, that there was nothing too hard for the Lord, that the Lord was "the Great, the Mighty God, the Lord of hosts . . . Great in counsel, and mighty in work" (Jer. 32:18-19).

But the city was surrounded by Babylonians, and the thing that God had instructed Jeremiah to say had come to pass. "And thou hast said unto me, O Lord God, Buy thee the field for money" (Jer. 32:25).

Jeremiah was distressed and perhaps doubtful of this wisdom; but the Lord gave him a good answer: "Behold, I am the Lord, the God of all flesh: is there any thing too hard for me?" (Jer. 32:27).

The Lord went on to tell him that he would deliver this city to the Babylonians and they should destroy it. The children of Judah would be carried away captive. But ultimately he would gather them again and bring them into this land, and they would be God's people, and God would be their God, and fields would be bought, and the land would again prosper.

A Pertinent Question

What Moses and what Jeremiah were thinking was this: "Can God do it?" And this question is pertinent. In fact there never has been, and there never will be, a time when men will not be asking, can God do it? And they will find their answer

in the Lord's question, "Is there anything too hard for the Lord?"

Men say, how could Moses doubt? During the past year he had witnessed the mighty acts of God in delivering Israel out of the power of Pharaoh. He had witnessed the great deliverance at the Red Sea and the destruction of Pharaoh's army. God had given Israel water out of the rock. He had given them manna day by day. He had done marvelous things for the people.

And if this were not enough, God had brought Moses up into the mountain and there had revealed himself and had shown him his glory.

But now Moses questioned God's ability to feed this people.

On the other hand, the prophet Jeremiah had not had such a demonstration of miraculous events, but God had been vividly real to Jeremiah. Men might think that Jeremiah's faith should have been stronger.

Everyone of us has this same problem. When God's intervention has passed and become a bit dim in our memories and we face difficult tasks, we also find ourselves asking the question, "Can God do it?" It is imperative that we come again and again to the throne of grace and to the Word of God and let our minds be refreshed and re-illuminated, that we might see and understand the great and glorious way in which God desires to work with us and through us.

What God Cannot Do

Is there anything that God cannot do? We have to answer: "Yes."

He cannot be untrue to himself or to others. It is his very nature to be true to his inmost being.

It is impossible for God to lie, for God is truth.

It is impossible for God to overlook sin. That is, he cannot

count it as nought. Sin is a disrupting, destroying, death-dealing force. It is darkness in a kingdom of light, and God cannot tolerate it. Therefore, he cannot overlook it.

God cannot work his works in the midst of unbelief. Jesus could do no mighty works in Nazareth because of the city's unbelief. When God works to achieve things for a man, he makes that man's participation dependent upon the faith of his heart, and if that faith is not there, God's works bypass that man.

As Jesus was hanging on the cross, the scribes and the priests said, "He saved others; himself he cannot save" (Matt. 27:42). As the Son of God and as God the Son, he had come to make things right between God and man; therefore, because of who he was and what he was to do, he could not save himself.

God cannot be hurried; God cannot be deceived; God is not mocked; God cannot be changed.

God can do all that he has purposed to do; and whatever the purpose of his heart, he will do it in his own time.

God purposed to create a universe, and he did. Within that universe, he created man in his image. That man rebelled against God, and forced a great chasm between God and himself. God purposed to bridge that chasm so that all who would repent and believe might be saved and be brought back within the fellowship of God and to the God-side of the chasm.

God still has his purposes, and God still works all that he purposes.

He Honors His Promises

God has promised that which will make every Christian a remarkable person. Belief that he keeps his word will enable any person to reach into the great treasure house of God's promises and watch God perform what he has promised.

God has promised to that individual who will receive the Lord Jesus Christ that he shall have a new heart, a new nature, that he shall be a partaker of the divine nature. These are remarkable and miraculous things. Can God make the drunkard sober? Can he make the harlot pure? Can he make the gambler honest? Can he save the lost "good" man? Can he reveal himself to the heart of a little child as well as to that of a grown person? All these things God has done and continues to do. Of these things we are constant witnesses.

Can God keep his promises about prosperity? God has made some straightforward statements to men about this matter.

In the first chapter of Joshua the Lord charged Joshua to be strong and courageous to the end that he might observe all the law which Moses, God's servant, had commanded. And then the Lord said, "Turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest" (v. 7).

But the Lord was not through yet. He went on to say, "This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous and then thou shalt have good success" (v. 8).

In the first Psalm we read that the man who meditates on the law of the Lord day and night is like a tree that is planted by streams of water, that bears its fruit abundantly. And that man who thus meditates on the law of the Lord prospers in whatever he does.

Proverbs 3:9-10 says, "Honor the Lord with thy substance, and with the first fruits of all thine increase: So shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine." This is a promise based on conditions.

In Malachi 3:10 the Lord makes promises that would save

obedient persons from poverty if they would but fulfil the conditions of that promise. "Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house." This is the condition, that we bring one tenth of our incomes into the house of the Lord that there may be ample supply for God's work, locally and around the world.

And God promises that, with the bringing of that one tenth into his house, we will be able to prove him in his promised faithfulness. What does he promise? "I will . . . open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it." That is like saying "I will open every bank vault and give you free access to all."

That is not all that God says. Israel was a people whose physical welfare depended upon the ground's producing its crops in season. It was also a land that every now and then had an invasion of destroying insects, such as locusts. Also, there would be droughts, and the fruit would not come to ripeness.

But listen to what God says he will do. "I will rebuke the devourer [the locust] for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground; neither shall your vine cast her fruit before the time in the field, saith the Lord of hosts" (Mal. 3:11).

Some people will say, "You wouldn't want me to tithe in order to prosper, would you?" Of course, the answer to that is no. But I would want them to tithe in order that there might be meat in God's house, and that the gospel might be preached around the world, that they might have faith in the God who makes the promise. The prosperity is his to give and theirs to receive, providing they believe God's word simply and implicitly. That is faith.

If God's children believe that God can do it, surely there is no question in their minds but that he will. Disobedience to this plain command and promise indicates that we have little

confidence in the ability of God to perform what he promises.

In the eighth chapter of Deuteronomy Moses relates to the people how the Lord has led them through the wilderness. God clothed them, fed them, and led them all the way, and they are to remember and not to say in their hearts: "My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth" (v. 17). But they shall "remember the Lord thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant" (v. 18). Then God says, "If thou do at all forget the Lord thy God, I testify against you this day that ye shall surely perish" (v. 19). This is prosperity in reverse.

Every person who believes this promise in Malachi discovers a promise-keeping God. The late R. C. Howard, Sr., of Oklahoma City was both a businessman and a pastor, and he was one of the few successful in both. He was a firm steward of God and a preacher of the tithe as the minimum that God required. He used to close his sermon on tithing by saying, "Any man who will faithfully tithe for one year and who does not prosper, if he will come to me and tell me that he has tithed faithfully and that God has not blessed him, I will pay back every penny that his tithe cost him." After many years of this promise, he said that no one had ever come to claim a repayment.

Yes, God can keep his promise concerning the matter of money, and, if we are faithful, it will not take us long to discover that he is doing it. And what has been said concerning this particular facet of our lives is true of every other thing that God has intended and promised. He can do it, and he will when our faith meets his conditions.

God's Plan Revealed

Why should God make known his purpose to a man, and then show to that man that he has chosen him to carry out this

purpose? He promises him great things and declares that his power will make the man able to do the things which God has purposed. Then, God acts to reveal himself to that man and through that man to all that follow him.

Therefore, having chosen his man and having communicated to him his purpose, there follows, in various ways and in various times, the manifestation of divine wisdom and power.

Every work which God has projected, great or small, when completed by his chosen man, has added much to men's knowledge and understanding of God.

The creation of the Messiah-nation, from whom was to come God's Anointed Man and Saviour of the world, furnished the great divine acts by which our God is known. The Bible is concerned primarily with the beginning, the progress, and the culmination of God's revelation through a chosen people and a chosen man, who became the world's Redeemer.

Within the framework of God's purpose and pattern a host of men and women were involved. Among these, as the pioneer and forerunner of a long line, were Abraham and his son Isaac and grandson Jacob. God asked Abraham to do the unusual thing: to follow his guidance, to leave his homeland and his kindred, and to go into a distant land which would be shown him. God informed him that there he would see the land which should become the home of a future people whom Abraham would father.

God asked the aging Abraham and the barren Sarah, now too old for such a thing, to expect the birth of a son. Humanly, this was impossible! Abraham and Sarah knew that. But God had spoken, and during the twenty-five years from the time they arrived in the land until its fulfilment in the birth of Isaac, surely they often asked, "Can God really do it?"

That they became impatient and somewhat unbelieving is evident in the Hagar-Ishmael episode. Following the birth of Ishmael, God appeared to Abraham reaffirming his word that

he would have a son by Sarah and assuring him that he was in no hurry. Abraham was to be the father of many nations, but a particular nation would come through Isaac. That nation would spend four hundred years in a strange land as captives and would be oppressed; but, at the end of those four hundred years, it would come out from that land and enter into this land which had been promised to Abraham.

Before Abraham's children would become a nation in the land of Canaan, God would fill in the pattern with other figures—Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Aaron, Joshua, and others—who would do great and miraculous things. The hand of God would be seen revealing that God could do it.

No better illustration of God's guiding providence in fulfilling his purpose is to be found than that shown in the life of Joseph. Joseph was despised and hated by his brothers, who plotted to destroy him. When an opportunity came to their hands to make a little money by selling him as a slave, they did just that. And these slave traders carried him down into Egypt and sold him into Egyptian bondage.

Possessed by an almost divine sense of righteousness and duty before the Lord, Joseph survived fierce temptations. For his victory he was imprisoned. There he became assistant to the head of the prison, and by a set of humanly unbelievable circumstances, in thirteen years he had become prime minister of Egypt.

Pharaoh was troubled by dreams he did not understand. Joseph interpreted these dreams, saying that God had revealed to Pharaoh that there would be seven years of plenty followed by seven years of drought and famine. Because of his wisdom in such matters, Joseph became the great administrator of Egyptian affairs during this period.

His brothers, knowing nothing of what had happened to Joseph, came to Egypt to buy grain. After their second visit Joseph made himself known to his brothers. "And Joseph said

unto his brethren, I am Joseph; doth my father yet live? And his brethren could not answer him; for they were troubled at his presence. And Joseph said unto his brethren, Come near to me, I pray you. And they came near. And he said, I am Joseph your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt. Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life" (Gen. 45:3-5). And thus God again revealed himself, having shown that he could do it.

God's pattern unfolded further with the arrival in Egypt of Jacob and his seventy descendants. The people multiplied. They became one and one-half million persons and found themselves in bondage to the Pharaoh of Egypt. Again, God's hand moved and he revealed himself in a full manner to Moses, and Moses became God's revealing man to Israel and to all mankind. When God laid Moses to rest in his unknown grave, the revelation to Abraham, given four hundred years before, had become a reality. God worked mightily, and Israel came to know him by his marvelous works.

The world knows the true and living God because he demonstrated through the life of this Messiah-nation, through Jesus Christ, and today through his believing people, that he can do it.

God still faces us and offers us the privilege of discovering him in carrying out a specific, assigned task for our encouragement. For the building and strengthening of our faith we have before us in the Bible examples of men who faced the question, "Can God do it?", and who saw him do it.

Could God deliver Israel from an enraged Pharaoh and his army at the Red Sea? They believed themselves hopelessly cut off and ready to be destroyed! They were fearful that all they had passed through would be for nought; but God, by his wind, opened the Red Sea and led Israel across safely. Could God do it? He did.

Could Gideon, God's chosen man, with an army reduced to three hundred, drive out the Midianites from the land? God did it and delivered them from their oppressor.

Jerusalem, surrounded by the Assyrian army, taunted by a proud, boastful general, faced imminent destruction. Unless God intervened all was lost! But there were in Jerusalem a praying king and a praying prophet. They carried their problem to the Lord, and the Lord did a marvelous thing and turned back the invader. Yes, God did it.

Three young men of Israel, on trial for their lives, refused to bow the knee to Nebuchadnezzar's image. Sentenced to be destroyed in the furnace, they declared that God could deliver them if he pleased. There was no question in their minds as to whether God could deliver. The three were cast into the fire, and their faith was justified. God did deliver.

The apostle Paul, God's chief voice in proclaiming the gospel to the Gentile world, had been imprisoned two years in Caesarea. As they sailed to Rome, a great storm overtook them. When all hope that they should be saved was gone, Paul stood forth in their midst and said to the men on the ship, "Be of good cheer: . . . for there stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve, saying, Fear not, Paul; thou must be brought before Caesar: and, lo, God has given thee all them that sail with thee. Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer: for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me" (Acts 27:23-25).

These things were written for our example and for our admonition and for the building of our faith.

God Can and He Will

It is our glorious privilege to discover and to find God as he reveals himself to us in his working with us and through us. We discover him as he imparts to us some task to perform and with it a word of assurance from his Book. As we stand upon

his Word and walk with the Lord in his work, we see God performing what he has said he will do.

Every child of God can discover God at work in at least one place—his own home. Many things beyond the power of human beings are achieved, and only God can do them. Every parent has the glorious work of setting a Christlike example, of being a good teacher, of breathing out an atmosphere of love and grace so that every person who is privileged to grow in that home becomes a work of God's grace.

Can God do it? If God has made the assignment, if you have received his word of assurance, if you commit yourself to him and the leadership of the Holy Spirit, it is a foregone conclusion that God can and will do what he has promised.

For encouragement we could turn to Romans 8:32, "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?"

The Israelites came to Kadesh-Barnea. There they were tested. In fear they refused to go forward under the leadership of Moses into the Promised Land. To Moses God said, "How long will it be ere they believe in me?" (Num. 14:11). In disobedience they turned back, and at God's command wandered in the wilderness until all who were above twenty years of age, except Joshua and Caleb, had died.

They had been victorious under God's leadership. Had they gone across under the leadership of Moses and had those thirty-nine years in the land with God, it could have made a vast difference in the centuries that followed.

When God calls, we should have but one answer, "Here am I, Lord, send me." God can do it. He specializes in things that seem impossible.

6. Prayer Unlimited

Within God's Limits

The greatest problem concerning prayer is not the problem of prayer itself but the problem of the Christian in his failure to pray. Those who really pray and make use of this God-given privilege constitute a very small minority among the great body of Christians.

The Christian's greatest resource with God and man is prayer. With prayer he opens the gates of heaven enabling God to pour forth his good things upon men. With prayer he releases the transforming goodness and power of God upon all. The power of a praying man is felt both in heaven and on earth. There is no greater potential given to God's children for blessing men than this marvelous instrument of prayer.

Prayer makes available the unbounded supplies of God. No one needs to walk in poverty, material or spiritual. Jesus said, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matt. 6:33). With but few exceptions we give hearty, mental assent to this teaching of our Lord. But with almost universal neglect we declare our unbelief and our infidelity in the matter of prayer. The great host of Christian people do not pray as God would have them to do.

If a limitless supply of material wealth were made available

to men upon conditions that any man could perform, every man would devote himself to the business of becoming qualified to obtain his share. None would delay nor turn aside, nor would any urging be needed from any source.

Is not this what God has done? He has made available the resources of heaven to any person who will comply with his conditions. Within God's limitations prayer is unlimited. Those limitations confine us within an area where the boundaries are beyond our vision and where the abundance is beyond our power to grasp; yes, and beyond our ability to consume.

Jesus declared this to be true. In his own life he gave abundant demonstrations of how God supplies and acts through the one who prays. His words and his works flowed out of his richly experienced relationship with his Father in heaven. Many times he separated himself from the crowds and went away to pray that he might feed himself in order to feed others.

Luke describes the situation in which the multitudes had come from every area—Syria, Tyre, Jerusalem—from everywhere they had come. They were being healed. He was teaching them. Suddenly he withdrew from the crowd and went away into the mountain to pray. He knew when he needed to pray and did not hesitate to stop work in order to do the thing that was most important. As a result, out of these praying times flowed everything he did and taught.

Many times he prayed even in the midst of a crowd. At the tomb of Lazarus he lifted up his eyes and said, "Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me. And I knew that thou hearest me always: but because of the people which stand by I said it, that they may believe" (John 11:41-42).

When he had finished his prayer he called: "Lazarus, come forth," and the dead man arose and came forth from the tomb. In every way our Lord demonstrated that prayer is the great means by which men know and accomplish the will of God.

Boundless Limits

Out of such a life of prayer Jesus gives us many promises about prayer. In these promises are the limitations or the fences within which we are to pray. But the limitations are so grand that none ever needs to feel cramped or in any way cut short.

Let me herewith set forth situations and Jesus' words concerning prayer. First is Matthew 18:19-20, "Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." Again, Matthew 21:22, "And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive." Then there are those in the fourteenth chapter of John, verses 13 and 14, "And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask anything in my name, I will do it." And John 15:7, "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you." And verse 16, "That whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you."

Surely, in these verses Jesus has set before us the marvelous possibilities of prayer. Limited, yet unlimited.

Then there are those words of Jesus which are without qualification when he said, "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For everyone that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened" (Matt. 7:7-8).

The apostle John in 1 John 3:22 gives a supporting testimony. He wrote, "Whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight." He expresses the same faith in God's

provision by prayer in 1 John 5:14-15, "And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us: And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him." Considering the greatness of this area in which God has limited prayer by two things, the name and the will—the name of Jesus and the will of God—we should not hesitate to lay hold and seek out all that God has provided for each of us.

We are forced to return once more then to James's word, "Ye have not because ye ask not." It would seem that Satan, the great deceiver, has truly deceived God's people and created within them a hopeless feeling of unbelief concerning prayer. But why?

To whom were these promises made? Immediately we say that they were made to his disciples that accompanied him. That is true, and their works show that they believed him and experienced what he promised.

But we believe that he made these promises to all of us, to all who should believe on him, and that includes each disciple in this day and in every day. None is excepted.

James wrote again concerning prayer in these words, "Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not. . . . And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain" (5:17-18). Elias had the same passions that we have, and we have the same that Elias had. Elias prayed, and God heard him. We can pray and God will hear us. These promises of our Lord are to the redeemed, the born-again children of God. He has no favorites; and when his children comply with his unchanging and unchangeable conditions, they find the greatest fulfilment. Truly prayer is unlimited within the limits which God has set, and none can complain that the limitations are too narrow.

In Jesus' Name

Let us take a good look at God's unlimited limitations. So much is available to us in the name of Jesus that it appears to be infinite in its scope. This being true, we should bend every energy we have toward the discovering of what he means by praying in his name.

First, let it be said that, from general observations, God does answer prayers that do not seem to fall within the more exalted limits of "in my name."

So, let us think concerning the name. With us a name means very little. Usually, a person bears a name because the parents had a friend with that name, or because it is a beautiful-sounding name, or it suggests something out of their own lives.

In the Bible, however, many names were given because of what had happened or what it was hoped would happen. A good illustration is that of Jacob, born with his brother Esau as a twin. He was holding on to Esau's heel during the birth process. They called him Jacob, which means "heel grabber," "supplanter." For ninety years he bore that name and, from his history, seemed to do his best to live up to it. Taking advantage of his brother's great hunger, Jacob obtained Esau's birthright. Later on, with the aid of his mother, he robbed his brother of the blessing. Some years went by, and there came a great time of crisis in his life. In that crisis he spent a night wrestling with God; and when the morning broke, he obtained his blessing and God gave him a new heart and a name, Israel. God said to him, "As a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and has prevailed" (Gen. 32:28). This was the meaning of his new name, and henceforth he lived according to what that name meant.

Consider another instance in the Old Testament concerning the name. This time it was the name of the Lord. In a time of

crisis in the life of Moses, God said, "I will make all my goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before thee" (Ex. 33:19). Then the Lord told him that there was a place by him in the rock and that he would pass by and let Moses see his hinder parts, but his face he could not see.

The Lord descended in the cloud, and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the Lord. And the Lord passed by before him, and proclaimed, The Lord, The Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation (Ex. 34:5-7).

What then about our use of the name? Perhaps we ought to start with Jesus' words in Matthew 6:7-9, "When ye pray, use not vain repetitions . . . your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before you ask him. After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father, which art in Heaven, Hallowed be thy name." If we would use the name of our Lord in prayer, these four words, "hallowed be thy name," should often be upon our lips and always in our hearts. Our greatest aim in prayer is expressed in these four words. When we have learned to pray these words continually and they have become a part of us, we are well prepared to begin to enter in to what Jesus meant when he said, "Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name."

To pray in his name is to be in his name and to have his name upon us. The best illustration of this fact is found in Jesus' statements in verses 8-13 of John 14. In these verses Philip said to Jesus, "Show us the Father, and we shall be satisfied" (RSV). Then Jesus answered, "Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father . . . Believest thou not that I am in the

Father, and the Father in me? The words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works" (KJV). Then Jesus goes on to say, "He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also." These words set forth the relationship between the disciple and his Lord. As the Father was in Jesus and Jesus was in the Father, so we who believe are in Jesus and Jesus in us. As Jesus said, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father." So it becomes true of us also, that he that hath seen us hath seen Jesus. We may be very poor representations of him; nevertheless we should do our utmost to give a true picture to those about us of the Christ that is in us.

It is out of this union with Christ that I enter into the experience of prayer in his name. To pray in the name of Jesus is to be so attached to him, so united to him that his thoughts become my thoughts; his desires become my desires; his life becomes my life; his nature becomes my nature; his prayers are my prayers and my prayers are his prayers.

When I believed in Jesus I received him. I received his name, his life, his will, his kingdom. I received his Holy Spirit. Therefore, to pray in his name is one of the most sacred works that I can do. Andrew Murray in his book *With Christ in the School of Prayer* said, "When His name is everything to me, it will obtain everything for me. If I let it have all I have, it will let me have all it has." "Ye have not because ye ask not." Apparently, we ask not because we do not understand what is offered and what the conditions are to those who pray in his name.

No one can know the power and the joy of the vine and the branch relationship who makes but little use of prayer. When we consider the terrible neglect of men in this matter of prayer, we can begin to understand the failures of people both individually and collectively, both as isolated Christians and as bodies known as churches. The great inefficiency and

powerlessness of the churches today can be traced to the prayerlessness of both leadership and laymen.

Every Christian should set his heart and mind and soul and will to pray regularly every day. The psalmist said morning, noon, and night will I pray. Unless we definitely set our purpose to pray for a worthy length of time daily, we shall never make much of the glorious gift of prayer. And when we pray as we ought, problems about prayer vanish. He who enters into the vine-branch relationship devotes himself not to the problems of prayer, but to the problem of getting himself to pray and continuing steadfastly therein.

The prophet Habakkuk wrote (3:19), "The Lord God is my strength, and he will make my feet like hinds' feet, and he will make me to walk upon mine high places."

The hind is the female deer. It is said that no animal can climb the rugged, rocky heights of the mountains like the hind. She leads her agile offspring to safety among the high rocks where no other animal can come. In traveling from rock to rock, she plants her front feet where there is perfect safety, and her rear feet land in the identical spot where her front feet had been planted. There is no danger that her rear feet will fall into a crevice and destroy her, because her feet are perfectly matched. And the prophet says, "[God] will make my feet like hinds' feet, and he will make me to walk upon mine high places."

Our front feet are our resolutions, our purposes, and we plant them firmly upon the rock, determined to have worthy prayer lives in the name of Jesus. Our rear feet represent our Holy Spirit-filled determination and will to carry through. In this area which we call prayer are the greatest high places; here we can walk by God's divine and glorious help. Prayer is unlimited within God's limitations, and failure here is total failure.

7. Stir Up Yourself to Pray

I bought a can of paint one day and as I was about to leave the store, the clerk said to me, "Let me stir it up for you." Thinking of how I had stirred paint with a wooden paddle and how much time it took, I demurred, "Oh, it will take too much of your time." But he answered, "No, just a moment."

He clamped that can of paint firmly on a machine, flipped a switch, and the can was thoroughly shaken and stirred. When I opened it and began to use it, it was in perfect condition. When I finished for the day, I put it away. A few days later I came back and found that it had settled and had to be stirred again before it could be used.

That can of paint is a parable of the prayer life of God's people. The prayer life has to be stirred, not just once, but again and again.

Another illustration is that of a wood fire in the fireplace. It burns low, and the top of the ash heap turns white. But if we stir the embers and put a little wood on them, we have a fire once more. That, too, is a parable of our prayer life.

It is a rare person whose prayer fire burns steadily without being replenished or stirred up. The fact is that this fire, like all wood fires, needs constant attention. It burns and glows for

a brief time; then, in our times of inattention, the blaze dies down, the heat vanishes, and we find ourselves in desperate need of stirring up the fire once more.

Furthermore, not only does the fire of prayer need attention, but nobody can tend to it but ourselves. We must take the initiative and see to it that we stir ourselves up to pray. We cannot depend on others for this service.

Not to stir ourselves up to take hold on God is in itself a great failure. Here lies the chief source of our weakness, our disobedience, our unfaithfulness. The secret of our failures lies in our failure to make use of secret prayer; and just as true is it that the secret of our successes is found in our practice of secret prayer. No one prays much in secret who does not stir up himself to this work.

Some years ago a pastor was speaking to a group of fellow pastors on the subject of prayer. Since his aim was to help them to deepen their praying, he felt justified in asking how much time each one of them spent daily in prayer. The replies were shocking. With a good deal of embarrassment they admitted that they did not spend regularly more than five minutes a day at this all-important business.

If the preachers do no better than this, the chances are that their congregations do less. We do not have to look far for the cause of the decline in spiritual power in our churches.

Since prayer is fellowship with God, five minutes daily reveals how little we appreciate God and the privilege of sitting before him. "Be still, and know that I am God" (Psalm 46:10). Just to fulfil this is indeed wonderful prayer. During such stillness our prayer could well be what Jesus taught us, "Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name" (Matt. 6:9). We need to sit before God long enough for the sacredness and holiness of his person to overshadow the spirit and mind. This cannot come to pass if we hurry in and hurry out. Take time, because praying needs time.

Prayer Initiative

Again let me say that this matter of stirring up oneself to pray depends on one's own initiative. Initiative of this kind is shown in Luke's account of the woman who had been ill for twelve years and had spent all her money on physicians and was no better but rather grew worse. She had heard the things concerning Jesus. She was ill, weak, weary, but she stirred herself up to lay hold on Jesus. It took a lot of initiative, a lot of courage, a lot of willpower to push her way through that crowd of men to reach Jesus. As she neared him her words failed; but, she thought, if I can only touch the hem of his garment, I shall be healed. Her faith was great. She touched him. Jesus read her thought, and the healing spark touched her body and brought her health.

Initiative is our own personal responsibility. We cannot lay this upon any other person. Another may stimulate us for a short time. He may put needed fuel on the fire. It may be done by a warm sermon or a good book on prayer; or we may go away into a prayer retreat with others. All these things do much for us, but the real stirring must be done by each person for himself. The only reason for a message on prayer is to set the listeners or the readers to praying; but one must bestir himself. It is not something to talk about, to preach about in sermons or devotionals. It is something to be practiced.

Earnest, prayerful thinking about God as he is seen and known through the teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ is a powerful motivation to prayer. Think upon his righteousness, his mercy, his love, his grace, his power, his work, his concern for men. Remember that all that Jesus was and taught and did is but a revealing of the eternal God. To think in this manner consistently, enables us to have a real personal touch as we bow our hearts in the divine presence. And this personal touch is a great stimulus for the practice of continuing to pray.

Jesus spoke of the Father's great concern for his children in several illustrations. He said: "Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings? And not one of them is forgotten before God." And again, "But even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. . . . Ye are of more value than many sparrows" (Luke 12:6-7).

Jesus said, "Your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him" (Matt. 6:8). The implication is that, being our Father and knowing our needs, he will supply them as we call upon him. God puts himself at our service when we pray, and this ought to stir our hearts whenever we think of it.

Granted petitions call for more praying. As we receive answers to our prayers, we are moved to pray for more, and to pray on and on. If one would keep a record of his praying and his prayers, what he asks and what he receives, then occasionally turn and read this record, he would find it exceedingly inspiring.

As answer after answer comes, there springs up in our hearts a spirit of thankfulness. We begin to say thank you to our Heavenly Father, and this thanksgiving becomes an artesian fountain. There is nothing quite so stirring in the matter of moving us to pray as being thankful to God for what he has done for us and with us. Thanksgiving begets prayer; and the more thanks we give, the more we are stirred to pray.

Another fact that will help us to stir up ourselves to pray is to recognize that God places a great dependence upon the prayers of a righteous man in behalf of others. This is beautifully illustrated in the case of Abraham's prayers for the city of Sodom. Abraham put his prayer on the basis of the number of righteous men in the city. When he reached the number ten he stopped. Is it beyond possibility that God would have spared Sodom even for one man's sake and that man Abraham?

It is also true that, according to the Scriptures, the eternal salvation of people depends upon the Christian's prayers. To save a man from hell is a work worthy of the death of the Son of God. But God has ordained that prayer is the pathway over which the Holy Spirit may go to bring conviction to the sinner's heart. Surely this would stir us up to pray. Think in the other direction for a moment: if we do not pray, men will be lost. This is not good to contemplate; at least, it does not give us any joy.

Personally, I have been stirred to pray as I have observed and felt the difference between praying men and men who do not pray. There is a sharp difference in the quality of life and spiritual tone that comes from the man who prays. That same difference is manifest among the churches regardless of their size. I once spent several days preaching in a church of fifty-eight hundred resident members. Some people say a church gets too big to be spiritual, but that church throbbed with the sense of God's presence. They are a praying people with a praying pastor.

Stir up yourselves to pray by reading of the men of prayer. There are many of them in the Bible. The record of their lives is but a sketch, but it is a sketch that can be developed because of the circumstances before and after the story of their lives. Without any doubt one of the greatest praying men in the Bible was Moses. We think of him as a man mighty in action; that is true, and we measure his prayer life by the greatness of his deeds. There are many such men and we need to know them; and knowing them from the standpoint of their prayers enables us to stir up ourselves to be like them.

Christ Sets the Example

Of course the chief person of prayer in the Bible is the Lord Jesus himself. His prayer practice is our example. His prayer teaching is our inspiration and guide. To stir ourselves to pray,

we need but spend time thinking of how Jesus went away to pray, and how he taught about it. Much of our lack of prayer is due to the fact that we are too busy, so we think, to pray. There are things that must be done, and to us they seem more important than prayer.

Jesus gave us a fine illustration of a busy life. Luke tells of a period when he was exceeding busy and withdrew to pray. "But so much the more went there a fame abroad of him: and great multitudes came together to hear, and to be healed by him of their infirmities. And he withdrew himself into the wilderness, and prayed" (Luke 5:15-16).

It seems to me that that decision took courage. May God give us that courage to withdraw ourselves from business to do the things that will make us able to achieve greater things. Luke goes on to say in verse 17 that shortly after Jesus came back, "the power of the Lord was present to heal." There followed instances of great healing.

Following the transfiguration experience, Christ came down the mountain to find the multitude and a man seeking to get the disciples to heal his son. They could not. Jesus healed the boy and they said, "Why could we not do it?" He answered that it was because of their little faith, for such things are done only by prayer.

Even a superficial leafing through the gospels will give one an understanding of how much Jesus had to say about prayer. It was emphatic and confident. He raised no questions about it. He simply said: "Ask and it shall be given you" (Matt. 7:7). He promised anything to those that asked in his name.

He did tell us a few things to do. He charged us to avoid praying to be seen and heard by men. He instructed us to enter into our inner chamber, shut the door, and pray to our Father who is in secret. He told us to pray simply and not repetitiously, to put our requests in a few simple words; for the Father knows what we have need of.

He also told us a few specific things that ought to be in our praying. First, we are to pray, "Hallowed be thy name" (Matt. 6:9). This is the heart of prayer: to approach God in deepest reverence and to ask him to make his name the name above all names revered. Again he says, "Thy kingdom come," and this embraces men everywhere that they too may have this greatest of all gifts, God as king in their lives. And again, "Thy will be done." This takes care of the total problem of obedience.

Sincerely, faithfully, believingly to pray these three petitions will transform our lives and will stir us to continue in prayer. Furthermore, concerning our physical needs he puts it all into one simple statement. "Give us this day our daily bread." That is, give us this day's bread today. What trust he asks for! And then he puts a condition on our praying that we are to forgive if we expect to be forgiven. This is written to God's children; understand by this that if we are to expect answers to any prayers, we must have a forgiving heart.

His teachings are rich and abundant; when read and pondered and meditated upon they will enable us to stir ourselves up to pray.

Prayer Records

I would suggest one other thing that would stimulate and stir us to pray, and that is the reading of the biographies of men who have been men of prayer. They are many. One of the best is the life of George Mueller of Bristol, England. This man and his wife, when he was twenty-six years of age, had been led of the Lord to decide to build an orphans' home. They would build this orphans' home depending upon God, "the Father of the fatherless" (Psalm 68:5). They would ask no human being for money, property, clothing, or food. All needs would be laid before God only. Their purpose was not only to feed and clothe and educate orphans, but to prove to

the world that God is a prayer-hearing and a prayer-answering God.

There were times when their faith was sorely tried. With several hundred orphans to feed there would be evenings when the cooks would tell him, "There is no food in the house for breakfast." And when Mueller had done his correspondence that night he would read his Bible awhile, get down on his knees and lay these needs before his Heavenly Father. And always before the time came for the children to eat, the food was on the table.

George Mueller kept a record of his praying. He put it in a journal entitled, "God's Dealings With George Mueller." Whether it was a little request or a big one he entered it, and when the answer came he wrote down the answer and the date. At the time of his death his friends went through these records and counted more than fifty thousand definite answers to specific petitions offered by this man.

Six weeks before graduation a young woman in our church began to keep a prayer record. At the end of that six weeks she said in a letter to me, "Six weeks ago I began making a record of my prayers, and in these six weeks I have had thirty-six definite answers." One terrible weakness that all people have is that they get answers to prayers and straightway forget them. If we are asked to give testimony in prayer meeting concerning answers to prayer we can remember none; but, if we had a record of them, we would be able to stand up and electrify the hearts of people with these accounts.

Another person, a young man, during his college and seminary days, had maintained a record for three years, and he wrote to me from the seminary saying, "I have spent a few hours counting the answers to prayer in my prayer record book, and I have more than 1600 answers." This ought to stir any of us and all of us to pray.

One advantage about a prayer record is that too much of

our praying has been indefinite, with a record we are forced to think and to make things definite. When you write down a request, you must clearly define it. Although you may not have been asking for much, when the answers come, you are made more aware that prayer is the victory that overcomes the world.

In this day especially we ought to bend ourselves before God to pray. The mission task is impossible without God's leadership; but if enough of his children will stir up themselves to pray, we will see magnificent victories in every area of the earth, and multitudes will come to the Lord Jesus Christ. Let us then stir up ourselves to be men and women of prevailing, intercessory prayer.

8. Behold Your God

Israel was at Mount Sinai. From the mount the Lord had revealed many things. The Jews had heard the voice of the Lord and were afraid. They said to Moses, "You go up unto the Lord and speak for us and don't let us hear the voice of the Lord any more. It is more than we can take" (cf. Ex. 20:19).

Moses went up into the mountain and was there forty days. While he was there with God receiving the Ten Commandments and a pattern of the tabernacle and its furniture, the people induced Aaron to make a golden calf. When it was done they built an altar before it and worshiped it, saying, "These be thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt" (32:4).

The Lord informed Moses of what was taking place and declared to Moses that he ought to destroy them; but Moses interceded on behalf of Israel, and God granted his request.

However, when he returned to the camp, he found it as God had said. Apparently it was much worse than Moses had imagined. His anger became so hot that he threw the tables of commandments to the earth and broke them. He rebuked the people sharply, then called for men who would go through the camp and destroy those that had sinned in this lustful worship.

Heavy of heart and full of sorrow at what the people had

done, he returned into the mountain unto the Lord and said, "Oh, this people have sinned a great sin. . . . Yet now, if thou wilt forgive their sin—; and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book" (vv. 31-32).

These were indeed dark and dreadful hours for Moses. Months and months of work seemed to have been for naught. His people had failed the Lord and were in grave peril of being destroyed. Again he made earnest intercession for them and only his great unselfish offer of himself in their stead saved them.

But he was grieved still more when the Lord said, "I will send an angel before thee; . . . for I will not go up in the midst of thee; for thou art a stiffnecked people; lest I consume thee in the way" (33:2-3). Concerned at this terrible sentence, Moses besought the Lord that he might know whom the Lord would send with his people. And the Lord said, "My presence shall go with thee" (v. 14). But still Moses needed encouragement and asked for an unusual thing. He said, "I beseech thee, shew me thy glory" (v. 18).

God granted this prayer. "I will make all my goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before thee . . . and he said, Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live" (vv. 19-20). The Lord did just what he said he would do. He caused his goodness to pass before Moses and made him to see his glory and to hear the name of the Lord proclaimed. This experience of God in his life renewed and strengthened Moses and enabled him to take up the load of leadership and move on.

A Vision Within

No man can be a man of God or do the work of God without the experience and the vision of the living God within himself. In proportion as one has the sharpness of vision concerning the Lord, so will his work be effective. Without the

vision a man is just an ordinary man using ordinary methods to try to perform an extraordinary task. This cannot be done.

God has always been ready to make himself known to his people. He said in Jeremiah 29:13-14, "Ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart. And I will be found of you, saith the Lord." Moses said something similar to Israel. "Thou shalt seek the Lord thy God, thou shalt find him, if thou seek him with all thy heart and with all thy soul" (Deut. 4:29). No man needs to be without the vision of the Lord.

As long as the Israelites had this vision, they lived righteously and achieved God's will. When the vision grew dim, the people lived contrary to the mind and the law of their God, and they found themselves in deep trouble again and again. In Isaiah's prophecy are these words, "O Thou that tellest good tidings to Zion, get thee up on a high mountain; O Thou that tellest good tidings to Jerusalem, lift up thy voice with strength; lift it up, be not afraid; say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God!" (Isa. 40:9, ASV).

"Behold your God!" What a commandment! And since this is possible to a humble, seeking soul, it is not a vain command.

Let us try to see God the Creator, God the Redeemer, and God the Father.

God As Creator

First, behold your God the Creator.

We turn to the first book of the Bible, and there in the opening sentence is one of the grandest statements ever to fall upon the ears of man. "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth" (Gen. 1:1). Then follows the divinely inspired account of God's creative activity.

There is no attempt to adorn this narrative with adjectives.

It is simple, inspiring, majestic. It sets out one great thing, that God is the Creator.

My early Bible reading was done in a Bible containing Bishop Usher's chronology at the top of the reference column in the middle of the page. According to that, creation occurred in 4004 B.C. I began the study of ancient history in high school. There I met dates of history that took place in Egypt long before 4004 B.C. My history book and my Bible disagreed, and I was in grievous trouble. Walking home from prayer meeting one night with my father, I told him of my heartache about this conflict of dates. He answered, "Son, just remember one thing: 'In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.'" My problem vanished, and I bless the wisdom of my father in undergirding me with an answer that has never failed.

The theories of men have come and gone, and the parade of theories continues to pass by; but as the theories disappear in the distance and other theories march up and pass on, we find that the Word of God still stands.

Some years ago a professor of astronomy in a great university spoke in our church on the theme, "Astronomy and the Bible." He related how in his early teaching days he had undertaken to work out a harmony between the theories of the origin of the universe and the first chapters of Genesis. He said that he had just gotten his harmonization worked out and had begun to use it when the scientists came up with a new theory that displaced the first. He proceeded once more to work out a harmony, and again that theory was displaced. The third time this happened he declared, "I decided that I would quit trying to harmonize the changing theories of man with the unchanging Word of God."

The great unshakable fact stands: the Lord made the heavens and earth, the sea, and all that in them is.

Contemplating creation, Isaiah wrote, "Who hath measured

the waters in the hollow of his hand, and meted out heaven with the span, and comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in the balance? Who hath directed the Spirit of the Lord, or being his counsellor hath taught him?" (40:12-13).

Again, Isaiah said, "To whom then will ye liken God? or what likeness will ye compare unto him?" (v. 18). And again, "It is he that sitteth upon the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers; that stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain, and spreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in" (v. 22).

And he reaches his glorious climax in verses 28-31. His first words in that passage are, "Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary?"

The writers in the Bible who think upon creation express themselves in a most wonderful way concerning the created universe. David in Psalm 19:1 is typical: "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handiwork."

Turning to the New Testament we find that the Lord Jesus Christ is associated with God the Father in the work of creation. John 1:1-5 says, "All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made" (v. 3).

The apostle Paul speaking of the Lord Jesus wrote, "Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature: for by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him and for him: And he is before all things, and by him all things consist" (Col. 1:15-17).

Not only did our Lord Jesus have a hand in the work of creation, but all things hold together by him and for him.

Paul says in Romans 1:20, "The invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and God-head." That is, they are understood by the things that are made. For this reason, the people of Israel are without excuse. When they knew God they did not glorify him as God, and they failed to be thankful. Because of this failure in their lives they became vain in their thinking, and their hearts became darkened. They counted themselves wise, but their wisdom was foolishness, and they turned to the worship of images.

The universe which the science of Bible days knew was very small. Today our astronomers tell us that they have not yet found the edge of the universe. Their mighty telescopes have picked up stellar bodies which they say are more than ten billion light years away. When we think upon the greatness of the universe and when we sing, "How Great Thou Art," let us remind ourselves that the Lord Jesus Christ, our Saviour, was involved in all this, and that the power of heaven and earth is his, and through him is available to us.

God As Redeemer

Behold your God, your Redeemer. The redemptive work of God is exceedingly important to every man on this earth. Through the Redeemer we have life eternal and hope of a future home in glory.

When God created man, he created him without sin. That is not to say that man had a character that was tested and proved and ultimately perfect, but it was sinless and in that sense perfect.

He not only created us without sin, he created us free. He created us free to choose to do God's will or not to do it. Our first parents exercised this freedom in rebellion and brought death upon all mankind. We still exercise this freedom and rebel against God. We have become the slaves of sin and of

Satan and are doomed to eternal night. Unless God had moved to save us, we were eternally lost.

In Jesus, God wrought redemption. This work took the best that God had. It was not a matter of overlooking man's sin. The sin must be disposed of, and this God did.

He could act only in holy love. The love of God is not a soft, easy attitude of God's mind and heart that looks upon man's sin as a little thing. How could it be little when it achieves separation between man and God? And love, such as we know in our relations with each other, simply could not bring man back. The love of God is a holy love, and Jesus was not so much concerned to reveal the love of God as he was to reveal the holy love of God.

This holy love of God acted in grace through Christ at the cross. "Him who knew no sin, he made to be sin for us that we might be made the righteousness of God in him" (cf. 2 Cor. 5:21).

God's holy love acted in wrath against sin. When we say wrath we do not mean selfish anger. We mean the righteous wrath that the surgeon exercises against a cancerous disease destroying a human body, or the wrath that is manifested by the farmer as he goes out to destroy the weeds choking his field of corn. The wrath of God is his settled purpose to destroy sin.

His loving holiness acted in mercy toward the sinner. Because God's holy love acted in wrath against sin, Jesus could say, "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

Leviticus 4:6 demonstrates how God dealt with sin under the old covenant. The sinner brought his animal for sacrifice. He put his hand upon the head of that animal and confessed his sin. Then with his own hand, he killed the animal. The priest took the blood, sprinkled the altar, and made atonement for

him, and he was forgiven. First atonement, then forgiveness.

In Jesus, God made complete atonement for sin and offered righteous forgiveness to the repenting, believing sinner. This forgiveness was purchased for us at the price of the blood of the Son of God.

We join Peter in recognition of our Redeemer: "Knowing that ye were redeemed, not with corruptible things, with silver or gold, from your vain manner of life handed down from your fathers; but with precious blood, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot, even the blood of Christ: who was foreknown indeed before the foundation of the world, but was manifested at the end of the times for your sake" (cf. 1 Peter 1:18-20). Behold your God, the Redeemer.

God As Father

Finally, behold your Heavenly Father.

This last is chiefly a New Testament conception. There are but three or four references in the Old Testament to the Lord as Father. Two of these are in Isaiah: "Thou, O Lord, art our father, our redeemer; thy name is from everlasting" (63:16). And again the prophet says, "But now, O Lord, thou art our father; we are the clay, and thou our potter; and we all are the work of thy hand" (64:8). In these two passages the relationship is a national one rather than a personal one.

However, when we turn to the New Testament, the relationship of father and child stands out clearly. Jesus calls God Father and teaches us also to say, "our Father."

The relationship in the New Testament is highly personal. It is mediated to the believer through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. Paul tells the Ephesians that "through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father" (Eph. 2:18).

And Jesus in John 14:6 says, "I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father but by me." There are those who speak lightly of God's fatherhood. In their thinking,

all men are his children. The only sense in which all could be counted children of God is as children of creation. But the relationship which Jesus taught us is a spiritual relationship, not a natural one.

That all men are not children in this sense is clearly evident in what Jesus said to the Jews, who should have been considered children, if anybody. "Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do" (John 8:44).

This father-child relationship is available to all, but it is realized only by those who believe. It is a part of God's gift of salvation. It specifically sets forth the relationship of the saved person as a child of the Heavenly Father.

The teachings of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount point clearly to the type of life that a child of the Father should live. We are to be like the Father.

First, let us ask the question, what is the Father like? Jesus gives a plain answer, one that even a child can understand. He says, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father" (John 14:9). Every quality of character and conduct and action in Jesus portrays the quality and character and action of our God and Father. A little girl who evidently had been mistaught said, "I love Jesus Christ, but I hate God." God our Father is like Jesus; therefore, we love him.

In Matthew 6 Jesus says many things about the Father. First, he tells us that we are to do our righteousness before the Heavenly Father. This demands a deep inner consciousness of being before God in everything that we do.

Our alms we give to be seen of the Father.

We pray to the Father. We enter into our inner chamber and shut the door and pray to the Father who is in secret. We pray in simplicity because he knows already what we have need of. We do not have to harangue him and beseech him for these things. The heart of our prayer is that his name be hallowed, that his kingdom come, and that his will be done.

Our Father feeds the birds. He also clothes the lilies; therefore, we trust him to provide all our needs. Our mission in life is to seek first his kingdom; it is his responsibility to provide for our needs. This, because Jesus said it was so.

Concerning the Father's readiness to answer our prayers, Jesus argues from the standpoint of an earthly father, saying, If your child asks you for bread, do you give him a stone? If he asks you for a fish, do you give him a serpent? If he asks you for an egg, do you give him a scorpion? If you earthly men are good enough to give good things to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?

This passage truly opens up the door of prayer. It makes it clear that everyone may have this privilege of bowing before the Father and receiving abundantly above all that we ask or think.

So then, behold your God!

He is the Creator of the universe and his greatest creation is man, made in his own image.

He is the Redeemer, restoring God's image by the new birth.

He is our Heavenly Father.

We need to seek to see his glory and his power manifested to us that we may be like him.

Isaiah describes how God revealed himself to Isaiah the young prophet. When the young prophet saw the Lord high and lifted up, sitting on a throne, and when he heard the angels saying, "Holy, holy, holy," he cried, "Woe is me, for I am undone" (6:5). Seeing God the Holy One, he then saw himself the unholy one. Thereupon, he received the cleansing! Because he had seen God and had been cleansed, he was able to hear the voice of God calling him to service.

And Job, after a long period of affliction and suffering, after defending himself and justifying himself in every way, at last

listened to the voice of the Lord, and cried, "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes" (Job 42:5-6).

Only as we have this vision of the Lord are we qualified and enabled to do service for our God. Without it we are ordinary men striving to do the impossible, and failing. But with the vision revealed in us, we become extraordinary men, enabled to do all that God has appointed.

9. God's Search for a Man

The ministry of Isaiah began about 742 B.C. His first recorded message is found in chapter 1 of the book that bears his name. Writing concerning the moral and religious condition of Israel, he says, "The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores: they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment" (vv. 5-6). This is Isaiah's description of the moral and spiritual situation in Israel. It had greatly deteriorated since the days of David.

One hundred years passed after the time of Isaiah. Then God laid his hand upon a man called Jeremiah. He commanded this man to show Israel her sins. The situation, far from improving, had deteriorated exceedingly since the days of Isaiah. It had gotten so bad that there was practically no hope for the people. God said to Jeremiah, "Pray not thou for this people" (Jer. 7:16). Three times he laid this injunction upon him.

Then the Lord gave Jeremiah instructions which, when performed, would reveal to the prophet the true situation. "Run ye to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem, and see now, and know, and seek in the broad places thereof, if ye can

find a man, if there be any that executeth judgment, that seeketh the truth; and I will pardon it" (5:1).

Jeremiah made his search and concluded:

They have made their faces harder than a rock; they have refused to return. . . . Surely these are poor; they are foolish: for they know not the way of the Lord, nor the judgment of their God. I will get me unto the great men, and will speak unto them; for they have known the way of the Lord (vv. 3-5).

He went to the great men. His conclusion was: "But these have altogether broken the yoke, and burst the bonds." There was not one righteous man among them.

A few years after Jeremiah began his ministry, Ezekiel, a son of the early captivity, began his prophetic work in the land of Babylon. Ezekiel quickly discovered that what had been true in Isaiah's day and in the days of Jeremiah was also true in his time. In chapter 22 he outlines the evil of this people. He presents them in the order of their positions of leadership in the land.

The princes of Israel, Ezekiel found, planned with one another to devour the people. They robbed them of their money and then killed them, making many widows in the land. They were like wolves devouring prey, and they destroyed souls to get dishonest gain.

Then he turned his attention to the priests of the land. These men were commissioned to show the ways of God to the people. They had not done that; rather, they had violated the law and profaned God's holy things. They no longer made any distinction between the holy and the profane, between the clean and the unclean.

Israel's prophets preached in such a way that the evil of these leaders was made even more corrupt; they had spread over the evildoers a cloak of religious approval. Men who should have turned the people, princes, and priests away from

their iniquity had led them into it. And Ezekiel went on to say, "The people of the land have made oppression their practice. They rob, and they oppress the poor and the needy and make life miserable and evil for the stranger in the land" (cf. 22:29).

These are the judgments which the Lord spoke through Ezekiel. And the Lord concluded this particular passage in these words: "And I sought for a man among them, that should make up the hedge, and stand in the gap before me for the land, that I should not destroy it: but I found none" (v. 30).

One man! Just one righteous, godly man! God said if he had found this man, he would have turned away destruction.

The Scriptures teach us that God blesses or destroys a city, a state, a nation, according to the presence or absence of righteous men therein.

God blesses and prospers a home according to the righteousness of the father who is head of that house. Good homes are not accidents. When a man and a woman marry, God intends that a godly home shall be set up. He has set the man as head over that house, not as a tyrant to rule, but as a servant of God to fulfil God's plan for a Christian home that would be a saving factor in the life of that community.

The man himself prospers or perishes according as he seeks God's righteousness inwardly and outwardly for his life.

Who Is Righteous

God said, "I sought for a man among them." God's search was for a righteous man, a man who was pleasing to God and through whom and by whom God could do his work in the land. What is a righteous man, and who is righteous? A righteous man is one who has been born again by belief of the truth. He is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. His life's passion and joy is to seek to know and to do the will of God. Obedience to

God's commandments is the underlying, basic foundation of his life.

When he keeps the commandments he does so in loving, personal obedience to God the Father, to Jesus Christ the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, the counselor and guide. His loyalty to the commandments, his loyalty to God, his loyalty to his church is a personal loyalty to Jesus Christ.

This man does not have to have a church job in order to be loyal and influential. The righteousness of his heart makes him faithful.

He does not have to be a Sunday School worker or a deacon or an usher in order to magnify his church. His righteousness causes him to do everything that pleases God. One righteous man or woman is greatly felt in the life of a church.

God's emphasis is on man's righteousness, not on his activities. Righteous men exude the sense and power and presence of God. They are deeply, inwardly righteous.

Many active, yes, superactive men in the churches are superficially righteous. They impress their fellows with themselves, with their zeal, with their works.

This type of righteous man can become unrighteous if he runs into opposition or if he feels that he has not received the praise that is due him for his deeds.

God says, "If I can find a righteous man I will pardon."

Going back to conditions in the days of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, and comparing those days with ours, we discover that men have not greatly changed. Although we no longer confine our traveling to walking or to camel back, but rather to jet and automobile, man is essentially the same.

The prophets show us the depths of iniquity into which men can fall when they forsake God and leave him out of account. Wickedness was rampant everywhere in their day.

In our own time we find that men are just the same. Every newspaper exposes the evil of mankind.

Man has conquered space up to a certain point. The mastery of man over things and over the elements is marvelous, but his lack of mastery over himself is pitiable and miserable. And his lack of mastery is evident in every area of modern life.

Every kind of crime is rampant. A newspaper recently reported that for the first nine months of the year in a certain southwestern city there were 15 more murders than there were the year before for the same nine months. There were 6 more rapes, 19 more robberies, 548 more arrests for drunkenness. Business burglaries had increased by 78 and resident burglaries by 11. Suicides had risen from 19 to 31, and narcotic arrests were up by 143. With terrific speed man is destroying himself morally, spiritually, and physically with alcoholic liquors. The manufacturers of intoxicating liquors are spending millions of dollars in advertising in an effort to bring every man, woman, and child under the influence of the ruinous stuff. We need not go on detailing the evils of our hour. They are evident to any man with two eyes, two ears, a mind to see and to understand.

In every community God is looking for righteous men who will "build up the hedge" and "stand in the gap" before him, that he might not destroy the land. He is searching for men who have been redeemed by the blood of Christ, who have been born of the Spirit, who have received the indwelling Spirit within themselves. To them he said, "You are not your own; you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body" (1 Cor. 6:19-20, RSV). He is calling these men of his to a holy and righteous life. The Spirit of God whom he hath put within us is holy because he is God; and because he dwells within us, we are in turn to be holy. We are to be and to do nothing that quenches or grieves this indwelling Holy Spirit. To these men he says, "Son, give me your heart. Let me live in you. Respond to my leadership. Be the man that I want you to

be; love me, serve me, worship me, live for me, and give me all you are."

To these men God has assigned his work. He would alarm us and awaken us to the perils that beset our children and all those that come after us.

The Christian home is certainly the focal point of strength for the church, for the community, and for the nation. God is searching for men who understand his viewpoint of what a home should be and who let that view become a part of their ideal in order to build homes for the glory of God and the good of the entire world.

Our country is beset by perils. We are constantly being alerted to the dangers of communism within our land. I would not minimize these dangers, but I believe that we have evils eating at our hearts that will destroy our nation just as quickly, if not more quickly, than communism. The liquor traffic, the immoral sexual pestilence that is destroying the youth of this land, a half-billion-dollar business in the sale of obscene literature, a declining vigor in the moral and spiritual lives of our churches. If we could but see it, the sword of destruction hangs suspended by a hair over us. Only righteous men can turn aside these elements that threaten our ruin.

God is searching for men who will set their own spiritual house in order. He is searching for men who will give priority to the things of God. He is searching for men that will look to the welfare of their families. He is searching for men that will safeguard their schools. He is searching for men that will take the gospel seriously and who will quit playing church; for men who will give place to the Holy Spirit within themselves and their activities and who will walk in him and with him and be Christian.

The men who ought to be in the places of leadership in the church are the men of deep, transforming righteousness. It is this kind of man that the Lord seeks for his service. There are

many offices within the church where these men may employ their talents and make effective that Christlike character which God has built within them. Our churches have great organizations that run, if they run, because righteous men are directing, leading, challenging. Every church has its body of deacons, and these men are deacons not by official choice alone, but because they merit this choice by fulfilling the qualities described in the New Testament.

Every man of the church should be one whose character qualifies him for any office the church offers.

There is no double standard of life and conduct for men of the church. All the people of the church are to walk by one standard, the standard which Paul gave us when he said we are to reach up to the measure of the fulness of Christ.

Many times in the past when it seemed that men would be swallowed up and destroyed by their own wickedness, God has sought out and raised up a righteous man to be the deliverer, and this man brought salvation and victory to the banner of the Lord.

It was so in the days of Noah. God saw that the wickedness of man was terrible and that his thoughts were evil, and the Lord decided to destroy man. One man found grace in his eyes and that man was Noah. He was the righteous man of the hour, and God sought him out and used him to save the human race.

When the time had come that the Messiah-nation should be set on its way, God called forth Abraham, a righteous man, out of his homeland to go into a strange land. There he was to bear a son, and that son would bear sons and some day the Messiah-nation would be born because God had his man Abraham.

God had his men Joseph, and Moses, and Joshua.

There came a time when there seemed to be no man available, and God laid his hand on the heart of a woman,

Deborah. Deborah turned back the evil tides and delivered Israel.

Then there were Gideon, and Samuel, and David, and the prophets.

In the New Testament we find others whom God chose for his task of saving the world from destruction. The Lord himself came in a human person and set in motion the forces that would form the church.

There were Peter, Paul, James, John, and a host of others who preached the gospel of redemption so that the evil tides were driven back and a new stream set forth into the sea of life. In the book of Hebrews we are exhorted to "remember your leaders and imitate their faith."

The apostle Paul exhorts us, saying, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service" (Rom. 12:1). And this is our reasonable service, that we let God use us to save our community and our world.

God seeks a righteous man! The first qualification is Christlike character: passion for goodness, for holiness, for righteousness. The fountain of his life must be pure and free from pollution, flowing full with the water of eternal life.

God is not attracted first by his executive ability; God does not measure him first for his leadership power; God does not listen to his silver tongue; nor does he take into account his college and university degrees, although these are good and useful.

God looks for a sound, whole, righteous heart, a heart so strong in the strength born of holiness that all that flows from the man reveals a Godlike creature. He said to Samuel, "Man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart" (1 Sam. 16:7).

All the gifts with which he is blessed are good; but first, if

God is to use him, he must be holy, he must be righteous. God can use a righteous man without great gifts far more than he can use a gifted man without righteousness. The men God wants must be "the salt of the earth" and "the light of the world."

10. Sanctify Yourselfs

The time for crossing over the Jordan into the Land of Promise had arrived. All Israel was on tiptoe in expectancy. This was the time which this particular generation had looked forward to. For thirty-nine long years they had wandered in the wilderness as their disobedient fathers fell one by one by the wayside.

God brought Moses up into the mountain; there Moses died, and the angels of God buried him. Joshua took over the reins of leadership and began to prepare the people for the crossing, according to God's instructions.

The day before the crossing Joshua gave the people certain definite instructions. Chief among these instructions was this word, "Sanctify yourselves: for to morrow the Lord will do wonders among you" (Josh. 3:5).

A New Road

One of the reasons for this particular instruction was set forth in this line, "You have not passed this way before" (v. 4, RSV). It is always pleasurable to go down the old highways. On those highways are familiar places, well-known buildings, well-known streams, and well-known people whom we meet. All these have a great attraction for us on the old paths. As we pass by and meet them, old memories rise up and attach themselves to our new impressions. There are not many

surprises on the old way, but there is joy. We go other places, and there are new highways to travel. We look forward with eagerness to the moment when we enter upon the new road. We are more alert and watchful.

Joshua said to these eager people of Israel:

The road before us is new. We have never walked this path before. It is urgent therefore that we keep the ark of the covenant in view. Keep a distance between you and the ark of two thousand cubits, about three thousand feet, a bit more than one-half mile. Thus keeping the ark in sight we will have the Lord's leading. You have not passed this way before. You must be cautious but not unbelieving. You must be thoughtful and you must be obedient. You must walk in faith today and tomorrow (vv. 3-6).

As it was for them, so it is for us. Unknown days and nights are before us. What those days will bring, only our Heavenly Father knows. We walk into each of them with our trust in him, walking by faith and not by sight.

There are paths where our feet have not walked. Those paths may be smooth and level; they may be rough and rocky; they may lead through deep waters and across unbridged streams. "We may not know the way we go, but we know our Guide."

And we know that our guide is with us. This is his promise: "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee" (Isa. 43:2).

There are tasks, works, deeds that will challenge us. We will face opportunities of which we have never dreamed. In some undertakings we may fail, but in some, through God's grace, we will succeed.

Joys and sorrows are before us. That is life's way. All sunshine would make a desert, but too much sorrow would

not be healthy either. The Christian must learn to accept disappointment as being "his appointment." For we have not passed this way before.

So, then, sanctify yourselves.

This is the step of supreme importance. Before the people of Israel could advance, they had to sanctify themselves. Before we can advance, we must sanctify ourselves. Before we can receive God's power and work, we must separate ourselves and dedicate ourselves to the Lord.

Separation

What, then, does this instruction mean?

For Israel, it meant separation from anything that they were practicing that was contrary to their worship as God had revealed it to Moses. For us, it means separation from every sin and every interest that hinders us from God's work.

I knew a preacher who was an active member of an active civic club in his city. The men looked to him for many things, and he gave himself without stint to help promote the things that they wanted to do. Certainly it required time and energy.

There came a day when this club began to get in between him and the Lord. This continued for some time, when one day a very spiritual woman of his church said to him, "You ought to get out of that civic club." God used this to jolt that man, and he prayed earnestly for the Lord's guidance. He did not want to get out, but God made it plain that if he were to be useful in the kingdom of God, he must separate himself from that club.

This he did.

He mailed his resignation on a Saturday. On Sunday morning as he entered his pulpit and sat down, the Holy Spirit moved him to think of a hymn that had this line in it, "Nothing between my soul and the Saviour." That preacher believes

today that that step marked the beginning of a deepening process in his life that has led to great spiritual progress.

This is not to say that every preacher should resign his membership in the civic club; but if God points the way of separation in that direction, then surely he will obey.

Perhaps one of the greatest needs in our church life today is this matter of separation from sinful things and separation from some good things that are made sinful because they become the object of our living. It is not a sin to make money; but when money making becomes a passion, it separates one from God, and one cannot get back to God until he separates himself from this sinful pursuit. In so doing he converts this pursuit into something worthy.

Sanctifying ourselves also involves dedication to the Lord and to his work. This is primarily a personal dedication to let the Holy Spirit fill and possess and use us for God's kingdom. We set ourselves to be obedient to the Lord in all that he has asked us through the Word, and in all that he asks us through our hearts and consciences. This is a sanctification that each of us does for himself, and unless we do our part in this matter, the Holy Spirit cannot carry on his work of sanctification. Consider the passage, Hebrews 12:1-2: "Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith." We are to lay aside the weights and the sin which beset us; this is the separation. We are to run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus; this is the dedication.

Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers. . . . Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty (2 Cor. 6:14,17-18).

Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse

ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God (7:1).

Seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth (Col. 3:1-2).

Mortify [put to death] therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness. . . . But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth. . . . Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness. . . . And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness (vv. 5-12).

In the remaining verses, through 17, is mixed this idea of separation and dedication. And in that familiar passage of Paul's, Romans 12:1-2, it is set forth clearly: "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God."

Jesus himself gave us a powerful appeal—in fact, an inescapable statement of this matter—in Matthew 16:24. "Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me." Not only is a man to separate himself from things and activities, but also from his old self; and he is to take up his cross and follow Christ. This is the acme of sanctification.

We are to come out and be separate. We are to turn from becoming conformed to this world, present our bodies a living sacrifice, and be transformed into the image of Christ. The command is clear. Sanctify yourselves.

There is a great promise given to those who will be obedient to this command but only to them. "For to morrow the Lord will do wonders among you" (Josh. 3:5).

Dedication

The necessity for sanctification lay in several things. First, the Lord would ask those people on the next day to do some things that he could do only with separated, dedicated people. Undedicated, unsanctified people would have laughed in God's face.

He was going to ask them to do what looked like an exceedingly foolish thing. The Jordan River was at flood stage, spread out across the valley and rushing madly into the Dead Sea. And the Lord asked them to march down to those flooding waters of the Jordan.

Through Joshua he said to the people:

Behold, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth passeth over before you into Jordan. . . . And it shall come to pass, as soon as the soles of the feet of the priests that bear the ark of the Lord, the Lord of all the earth, shall rest in the waters of Jordan, that the waters of Jordan shall be cut off from the waters that come down from above; and they shall stand upon an heap (3:11-13).

To an unsanctified person this would have seemed a foolish thing and dangerous, but the people saw God work. "And as they that bare the ark were come unto Jordan, and the feet of the priests that bare the ark were dipped in the brim of the water, . . . that the waters . . . stood and rose up upon an heap very far from the city Adam" (vv. 15,16). Joshua said, "Hereby ye shall know that the living God is among you, and that he will without fail drive out from before you [your enemies]" (v. 10).

God must have people who were sanctified, for he was going to ask them to do yet other things that would seem exceedingly foolish to the world. He was going to ask the army of Israel to march daily in silence about Jericho, and on

the seventh day they were to march around the city seven times. Then at the command of Joshua to blow the trumpets and to shout with a great shout, the walls of Jericho would fall.

Who but sanctified people would believe such a maneuver? It might be profitable for us to consider what was passing through the minds of the people behind the walls of Jericho as they saw the daily march of this Israelite army. No noise, no weapons in action, just the steady march, march, march. They must have thought Israel was insane!

Then God asked them to destroy Jericho utterly. The people, the gold, the silver—everything was to be destroyed. Unsanctified people would not have obeyed this injunction. They would have been looting the entire city for everything of value. One man did disobey; his name was Achan. But the wonder is not that one man disobeyed, but that so many obeyed and were faithful.

Unsanctified people would forget that the Lord did it. That was true then, and it is true now. Many times God uses men to accomplish great things, and when the things have been done, they seek praise and glory for themselves. In so doing, they destroy their power and their usefulness. The praise and the glory belong to God, and when men know this and give it to him, then he in turn gives his power and puts his glory upon his men.

Because God was going to ask men to do things that were humanly impossible, and in the wisdom of men exceeding foolish, he must have men who were so sanctified, so separated from dependence upon worldly things, so dedicated to God and his ways that he might work his mighty will.

We live in a world of aggressive and high-powered leadership. Men are enamored, even in the religious world, of big organization. Human leaders occupy the stage. God disappears from the common view. This is true locally and

denominationally. Our churches are infected with a virus of man's greatness and of man's great organization. Promotion is the order of the day. We sing the praises of our leaders; magnify statistical reports; exalt the numbers in our membership; advertise the great attendance, the size of our buildings, the magnitude of our budgets. God drops out of the picture.

May God call us back to the spirit of his young servant, David. David must have been a giant of a young man. When they sought armor for him, they put on him the armor of the biggest man in the army, King Saul. But he was not accustomed to such things. His experience had been with the sling and stones, and with these he could knock the eye out of a sparrow at twenty feet. He was like the seven hundred Benjamites in Judges of whom it was said, "There were seven hundred Benjamites, lefthanded men that could throw stones at a hair and not miss" (cf. 20:16). David was a sharpshooter with his sling and his stone; but David did not boast of his skill. When Saul questioned his ability to go against Goliath, David told King Saul:

Thy servant kept his father's sheep, and there came a lion, and a bear, and took a lamb out of the flock: And I went out after him, and smote him, and delivered it out of his mouth: and when he arose against me, I caught him by his beard, and smote him, and slew him. Thy servant slew both the lion and the bear: and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be as one of them, seeing he hath defied the armies of the living God. David said moreover, The Lord that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, he will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine (1 Sam. 17:34-37).

Then said David to [Goliath]: . . . I come to thee in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied. This day will the Lord deliver thee into mine hand; . . . that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel. And all this assembly shall know that the Lord saveth not with sword and spear: for the battle is the Lord's, and he will give you into our hands (vv. 45-47).

There are many illustrations in the Old Testament of how men believed that the Lord would do the work; not man, but the Lord would do the work. This idea that the Lord does the work was well expressed by the apostle Paul: "He that wrought in Peter unto the circumcision, wrought also in me unto the Gentiles" (cf. Gal. 2:8). "For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure" (Phil. 2:13).

Are we worshipers of men or of God? Do we believe more in the willingness and power of men to accomplish God's work than in the power and willingness of God to work with and through men, so that God is glorified?

To do his work the Lord must have sanctified people. They must be sanctified people in the sense that they are dedicated to Bible reading, Bible believing, and Bible practicing; that they are dedicated to prayer and to the acknowledgement that the Holy Spirit, and he alone, can do God's work and that we must rely on him. Sanctify yourselves! Separate yourselves, come out from among them and be separate! Put away every weight, lay aside sin, and be not conformed to this world.

Present your bodies. Run with steadfastness the race that is set before you. Be transformed. Perfect holiness in the fear of God. Yes, pray, read your Bible, witness to the Lord's saving grace, make attendance at every service your goal. This is the least of the service we can render for God's glory. Strive mightily together for the glory of God and the revealing of Jesus. Let us make the song true not only in singing but in practice.

Take my life, and let it be
Consecrated, Lord, to Thee;
Take my hands and let them move
At the impulse of Thy love.

FRANCES R. HAVERGAL

11. The Fatal Heresy

In the first chapter of the book of Revelation John describes his vision. He says, "I saw seven golden candlesticks; And in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of man. . . . And he had in his right hand seven stars. . . . The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches: and the seven candlesticks are the seven churches" (vv. 12-20).

John directs his words to the Ephesian church through its messenger, the "angel": he who holds the seven stars in his right hand also walks in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks, and he is among the churches. Jesus says, "I know." To this church in Ephesus he says, "I know thy works." They doubtless had organized giving; they had organized care for the poor; they were greatly evangelistic and must have been missionary-spirited, for the gospel went out from Ephesus into all the province of Asia.

When Jesus said, "I know . . . thy labor" (Rev. 2:2), he meant not only their activities but the dynamism of their energy and deep concern. He said, "I know thy patience," and patience here means steadfastness. He knew their perseverance.

Further, he said, "I know . . . thou canst not bear evil men," either in the community or in the church life. This would imply that there was no hesitancy on the part of this church to discipline disobedient members.

Here was a church capable of being truly great. Outwardly, everything was of the very best. It was a beehive of activity, a church of workers. It was a church that had fine staying qualities. It was intolerant of evil men. It was an orthodox church, correct in its doctrines and an earnest defender of the faith. All of these things the Lord graciously and heartily commends.

But he who walks in the midst of his churches and whose eyes are as a flame of fire detects another kind of heresy, the most fatal of all heresies. He says to this church, "Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love" (v. 4). There is a burning zeal, there is ceaseless activity; and to the eyes of the community and the church itself, nothing more could be desired. But to the eye of him who walks in the midst of the churches, their hearts had grown cold toward him. With their lips, with their hands, with their feet, with their brains they still carried out the work of a church, but their hearts were not in it. As Jesus quoted Isaiah, "This people . . . honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me" (Matt. 15:8).

This is the fatal heresy. Nothing will destroy a church and its power in a community and the world any quicker than to lose its first love.

First Love

There are men and women who work for their church like slaves, who have no particular love for Jesus Christ. There are men and women who fight for orthodoxy or for neo-orthodoxy like soldiers gone mad, but love for the Lord Jesus Christ is lacking. I say this is the fatal heresy.

Just what place did the Lord Jesus Christ give to this great quality of life and character—this thing we call love? He spoke out clearly so that no one need fail to understand what he thought must be first in their lives.

The scribe asked him, what is the first commandment? And Jesus answered, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself" (Luke 10:27).

In another passage Jesus exalted love when he said, "Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you" (Matt. 5:43-44). This was a new teaching and a difficult one for the Jewish people to receive. It is no less difficult now.

After he had washed the disciples' feet, Jesus said to them, "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another" (John 13:34-35).

God manifested his love for the world in the gift of his "only begotten Son," and there is no question that Jesus also placed love high. Perhaps at the highest point of all was the love that he asked of his disciples. In the book of John Jesus says:

If ye love me, keep my commandments.

He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him.

If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him (14:15, 21, 23).

As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love. If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love.

This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you (15:9-10, 12).

To the Ephesian church he said, "You have left your first love." Do we need to make a mystery out of what is first love? Is not first love the love that is first in a man's life? And is not the first love for every Christian this warm, tender, living affection for Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord? It is the love which puts Jesus first in everything, which recognizes him as the one who suffered and died for our sins, who was raised from the dead, who is at God's right hand, who is coming again, and whom we love dearly.

It is this first love, this glowing affection of the whole being, that matters to Jesus our Saviour and Lord! Its absence is the supreme and deadly heresy.

The apostle Paul, writing to the Philippian church, tells them that he gets great joy out of praying for them. He tells them that he has them in his heart and that he greatly longs after them in the tender mercies of Jesus Christ. And then he says, "And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment; That ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ; being filled with the fruits of righteousness" (1:9-11).

And he tells the Ephesians that he prays for them that God will grant them strength with might by his Spirit, that they may be rooted and grounded in love, and thus able to comprehend the breadth and length and depth and height and "to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge that you may be filled with all the fulness of God" (cf. 3:14-17).

Grounded in Love

In these verses it becomes clearly evident why love is of primary importance and why love should be the first thing in the Christian life. When this love is present in a man in fulness, he is able to discern the things that are excellent and to know the difference between that which is good, better, and

best. He is able to be sincere and no longer a stumbling block, and he will be filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ.

In this letter to the Ephesian church Paul prays that they may be "rooted and grounded in love." This is a remarkable figure of speech. Love is the ground, the soil in which the tree of character is to be rooted, and from that rich soil of love the tree of Christian character grows and bears fruit.

In 1 Corinthians 13 Paul sets forth the primacy of love in everything. Service without love is useless. Character without it is nothing. Giving, even to the point of making our bodies the offering to be burned, without love accomplishes nothing for us.

The Revised Standard Version (vv. 4-7) describes love in these terms, "Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things."

Love then is the inspiring, motivating, compelling force within the Christian that makes him an effective servant and witness for Jesus Christ. Without this love he may go through all the motions, but he accomplishes nothing.

Jesus said, "If you love me you will keep my commandments." Love then takes care of the matter of prayer. If we love a person, we desire greatly to have fellowship and communication with him, and we do everything we can to establish such relationship. Loving Christ, we want to speak with him and hear him speak with us. Love takes care of the matter of prayer, and the absence of prayer would indicate an absence of love.

If we love God we will read his Word. If I am away from home and I receive a letter from someone I love, I want to read that letter not once, but several times. The Bible is God's

love letter; it is his will expressed for us. It is the manifestation of the love of God and we want to read it. Love for the Lord takes care of Bible reading, and if there is but little Bible reading, it is proof that there is but little love.

When there is love for the Lord, church attendance becomes easy. We have the Lord's promise that "where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst" (Matt. 18:20). Although he is always with us individually, in a special way he is also walking in the midst of the people; and because we love him, we will be there also. Not to be there is to manifest the fact that there is little or no love for the Saviour.

Stewardship becomes a matter of fulfilling the requirements of this love of the Lord. If Christian stewardship, proved by tithing, is any indication of love in the hearts of God's church people, there must be very little love in the churches. True Christian stewardship would offer one tenth as minimum, and its maximum would know no upper limits but the love of God.

Love inspires personal witnessing. If we love the Lord Jesus Christ, we will want to tell others about this one who is the center of our affection and who inspires us with his presence.

Our character will become suffused with this love of the Lord Jesus Christ, and others will find us becoming more and more like him whom we love. Our following Christ will be stimulated and strengthened as our love for him increases.

In the second letter to the Corinthians the apostle Paul says that the love of Christ constrains us. It constrains us in all that we are and all that we do.

This love is a fruit of the Holy Spirit's presence within us. It flowers as we open our hearts to the Spirit of the Lord to receive it. It can become more intelligent and powerful as we demonstrate it in action. We also can help to increase this love

in others if we do as Paul did for the Philippians—pray that their love may abound.

Jesus said by this love that ye have one for another shall all men know that you are my disciples. One day of the manifestation of this love, one for another, in Christ will do more to make men understand the love of God than all our loveless acts and sermons. Love is the mark of the Christian. It is said that the Romans said of the Christians, "Behold how these Christians love one another."

The Tragedy of Lost Love

The loss or absence of Christian love creates unfaithfulness, brings error, and produces worldliness in the life of God's people. It goes on to destroy not only the one who has lost it but others who are affected by his loss. The absence of this love means little power or none in the church. The services of worship will be dead. The preaching of the truth will fall on cold hearts. The teaching of the Word in Sunday School classes will have no transforming effect.

Its absence means a loss of missionary zeal. It means putting local work above the world missionary call. It means the loss of active support financially and otherwise for the effort to carry the gospel around the world. There is just one true and effective motive for all missionary endeavor, and that is the love of Christ. Jesus said, "If ye love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15). He commanded us by his authority and power to go into all the world and preach the gospel. If we love him we will go.

It is a stark tragedy to love the church and its work and not to love Jesus. People can be attracted to membership in organizations because they are lonely. They can be led to give from a sense of unselfishness and sharing. They can be interested in missions for humanitarian motives. They can be defenders of the doctrines, even do work with lost men, and

not have a personal love for Jesus Christ. This is indeed a tragedy.

Our churches today are a great deal like the church in Ephesus. We work; we stand for the doctrines of the New Testament with vigor and loyalty. But do we have this great overflowing love that makes a church effective? Our churches are efficiently organized. They are wealthier than ever before. They have never promoted evangelism with more intensity, better organization, nor more plans than in this hour. The Lord well knows our works. Does he find a love in our hearts that puts him first in our affection, makes us sensitive to his will, and motivates effective witnessing for his cause?

Have you lost this first love? How will you recover it?

First, remember Jesus Christ. Remember how he lived among us sinless, without spot; sensitive to the wickedness and hurt of the world; suffering, bleeding, dying for us all. Set your mind upon these facts until you see the love of God springing forth and reaching into your own heart.

Repent of the lovelessness that is within you. Acknowledge that you do not love him, praying that he will forgive, and he will.

Then yield yourself to the Holy Spirit who will fill you with love.

12. They That Wait for the Lord

Many years ago I knew a fine student couple who had worked together in Baptist student work. Often they had met to pray. Theirs was a real friendship.

In their senior year their friendship blossomed into love, and love into engagement. All their friends were pleased and rejoiced with them. They seemed to be so well fitted for each other and for the Lord's work that only great joy could be ahead.

But about a month before graduation the young lady became possessed with a conviction that she did not love this young man. She admitted that she admired him, respected him, and honored him, but she declared she did not love him. She was not cold nor indifferent in these words, but tender and kind. For him, the whole world turned black. He cried out to the Lord for understanding as to why such a thing had come to pass. Had they not prayed every step of the way? Had they not sought the Lord's leading? And when they finally became engaged, did they not believe that that too was of the Lord?

The university year came to an end, and with these things in mind, the young man and woman went home to opposite ends of the state.

August came and with it the Baptist Assembly at Falls Creek. Each of them came and stayed in our cabins. They talked together much, with each other and with their pastor. They sought our their pastor, and each talked to him privately. The young woman was unchanged, and so was the young man. He still cried out for light and understanding as to why such a thing had to take place.

One day as he talked with his pastor, his pastor said to him, "You say you have prayed every step of the way and you feel that the Lord answered your prayers. Did you find a promise from God's Book?" He answered, "No." Upon the advice of his pastor, he took his Bible and went out into the woods. Two or three hours passed, and when he came back his face was at peace and so was his heart. He had found a verse that gave him comfort. It was Psalm 27:14, "Wait on the Lord: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart; wait, I say, on the Lord."

That day he believed that the Lord was saying to him, "If you'll just wait awhile, I'll work all this out, and her heart will be toward you once more." That evening he took his clothing and returned home.

He was going to medical school in January and had five months before he was to leave home. He gave himself with complete abandon to the work in his church. Immediately he was made general superintendent of the Sunday School, and under his leadership the work grew vigorously.

About a month after he arrived home, he wrote me a letter saying, "Preacher, I've discovered what wait on the Lord means. It means wait on him like a servant serves his master." With that meaning in mind, he went on to medical school. After several years, when he had completed his internship, he married a wonderful young woman who has been his companion in everything and a great blessing to the kingdom of God through these many years.

Waiting and Serving

The young man was right in his understanding in both directions. First, waiting on the Lord means waiting for him to work his will. Secondly, he was right in his understanding that waiting on the Lord means serving the Lord as a servant waits on his master. The Authorized Version in translating these phrases uses the word "on," that is, wait on the Lord. In some instances it speaks of "they that wait upon the Lord"; but later versions speak in this fashion, "wait for the Lord." Are they not both right? When one waits on the Lord in service he must wait for the Lord in many things. He waits for his appointment and power, then moves out and waits on him in doing his will.

There are many verses which set forth this great truth of waiting upon, on, or for the Lord. In Psalm 27 David starts out with a strain of triumph and victory. There is no one who can cause him to fear because the Lord is the strength of his life. His enemies stumble and fall. There is no host big enough to make him fear. Even in war he is confident. One thing he desires—that he may be with the Lord all the days of his life. The Lord is with him in times of trouble, and David is victorious. But a cloud seems to come between him and the Lord in verse 7. His faith seems to hold strong in such expressions as, "When my father and my mother forsake me, then the Lord will take me up" (v. 10). He praises God for deliverance and says, "I had fainted, unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living" (v. 13). Then comes the word from God in verse 14, "Wait on the Lord; be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the Lord."

Psalm 40 begins with these words, "I waited patiently for the Lord; and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry." Psalm 37:7 exhorts, "Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him:

fret not thyself because of him who prospereth in his way, because of the man who bringeth wicked devices to pass."

Most of the statements, wait on the Lord, are found in the Psalms, especially those that come from the pen of David. Psalm 62:1-5 says, "Truly my soul waiteth upon God: from him cometh my salvation. . . . My soul, wait thou only upon God; for my expectation is from him." David is the choicest illustration of waiting on the Lord and for the Lord.

He was anointed to be king of Israel at an early age, probably somewhere around twenty years. He was immediately active in the affairs of the government and became a general of the army. He was demoted because the people praised him above Saul. Finally, to save his life he fled. Several times Saul set out after him with a large armed force.

One night Saul and his men camped in the entrance of a cave. Back farther in the cave were David and some of his men. During the night he came out with one of his men to where Saul was sleeping.

"Then said Abishai to David, God hath delivered thine enemy into thine hand this day: now therefore let me smite him, I pray thee, with the spear even to the earth at once. And David said to Abishai, Destroy him not: for who can stretch forth his hand against the Lord's anointed, and be guiltless? David said furthermore, As the Lord liveth, the Lord shall smite him; or his day shall come to die; or he shall descend into battle, and perish. The Lord forbid that I should stretch forth mine hand against the Lord's anointed" (1 Samuel 26:8-11).

Many of those who have been anointed king have instigated rebellion and overthrown the government, establishing themselves; but David waited on the Lord.

Even after the death of Saul and after Judah had anointed him king, he was content to wait on the Lord for Israel to make him king over the whole nation.

Another choice passage is Isaiah 40:28-31. Isaiah speaks of the power and might of the Creator. He describes his inexhaustible power and utter inability to become weary. He declares that the Lord gives power to the faint, and to those who have no might he supplies strength. Then he says that even those who are strong (the youths) "shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint."

These verses supply infinite encouragement to men of finite faith. These words connect us with power that is limitless and eternal and undiminishing; and as we abide in him and wait for him, his power becomes our power.

What We Wait For

Wait for the Lord to show you his plans. That is not man's characteristic frame of mind. But it is the frame of mind that every Christian should cultivate. The fact is that God has a plan. He does not force it upon anyone, but he invites everyone to seek it. His plan is so much greater, so much more complete, than anything we can conceive, that unless we cultivate waiting upon him and for him, we will miss it.

His plan for his children embraces everything that the child of God is concerned with. Nothing is left out. It embraces the child personally; it embraces his family and everyone in it and all that they are to be and do. It embraces his own personal work, whatever his work may be. It embraces his relationship to his church and the work he ought to be doing there.

"My times are in thy hand," said David (Psalm 31:15). We need to see what God's plan is for our character and for our lives.

Waiting for the Lord means waiting for his directions. If we can put missiles into orbit and guide them to distant planets

by radio, surely we ought to believe that when God puts us into his work he also can guide us by his power through his Spirit. That does not mean just general guidance stretched out over long years. It means guidance moment by moment, day by day. Therefore, we wait on the Lord for his directions.

Psalm 37:23 says, "The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord." This does not say the long journey is ordered by the Lord, although it is; but it does say that every step of the long journey is ordered by the Lord.

Somebody in typing this verse once let a typographical error slip in and wrote, "The *stops* of a good man are ordered by the Lord." This also is true. John Ruskin said, "There is no music in a rest but there is the making of music in it." Our stops as well as our steps are ordered by the Lord.

Wait on the Lord to show you his promise or promises. Many times as we think about a bit of work or a decision we need to make, we weigh every bit of evidence for and against; then we pray and feel some answer in our minds and hearts. We probably could act on that answer, but it might be a faltering step. If we wait prayerfully, God may lay a Scripture verse in our hearts that will confirm the answer. We call that a promise. It is not that we are trying to persuade God to do what we want, but that God is endeavoring to reveal to us what he wants; and by his words he confirms our decision. Wait, therefore, for his promise.

Wait for his power. This was Jesus' word to his disciples just before he ascended to the Father. He said to them, "Tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high" (Luke 24:49). In Acts 1:4 he commanded "that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father which, saith he, ye have heard of me."

God spoke a word of power through Zechariah to Zerubbabel, the governor of Jerusalem, and the word that God spoke then he still speaks to us. "This is the word of the Lord unto

Zerubbabel, saying, Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord of hosts" (Zech. 4:6).

Waiting for the Lord to endue us with power is our way of acknowledging to the Lord that without him we have no power, and he honors that kind of waiting.

We wait for the Lord that he may perform his word, and this he says he will do. God said to Ezekiel, "Therefore say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God; There shall none of my words be prolonged any more, but the word which I have spoken shall be done, saith the Lord God" (Ezek. 12:28). These words certainly put strength into our spiritual lives.

How to Wait

We are to wait patiently. The psalmist wrote, "Rest in the Lord and wait patiently for him. Fret not thyself" (Psalm 37:7). The word "patiently" seems to express qualities inherent in the expressions "rest" and "fret not." Rest in the Lord and do not fret. This command is perhaps one of the most difficult aspects of waiting on the Lord. We are so impatient that we press the Lord for action when he wants us to wait; but some things need time to grow and develop.

A striking illustration of patience is found in the experience of Abraham. God promised him a son by Sarah. Ten years, fifteen years went by, and not until the end of twenty-five years was this promise realized. Twenty-five years Abraham waited patiently for the Lord.

We are to wait faithfully, steadfastly, and not give up. God honors this kind of waiting, too.

Wait courageously. He who says it does not require courage to wait has done very little waiting. We need courage in the face of the unbelief of people about us. They look with raised eyebrows, not understanding, and perhaps judging us as lacking good sense because we continue to wait on the Lord to work out the problem.

When we wait in faith and in trust, courage is not too difficult. I think of Paul's word concerning Abraham, "And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb: He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; and being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform" (Rom. 4:19-21). This was waiting in faith.

We are to wait in obedience. God's children are a bit short in this matter of obedience. We figure things out in our own way, work them out in our own strength, then wonder why we have problems. When God marks out a plain path, he means for us to walk in that path without questioning and without deviation. King Saul walked the bitter path of disobedience and heard the stern words of Samuel saying to him, "Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry" (1 Sam. 15:22). The old song says, "Trust and obey, for there's no other way to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey."

Wait standing on God's promises! God does give promises to his children. Whether it be a promise that has general significance, or one that has been made to you specifically, you are to stand on that promise year after year because all promises have a continual stream of blessing flowing from them and through them. Wait on God and his promises.

Wait, and work while you wait. God makes an assignment but it is not an isolated assignment. It has its connections before and after. We begin the assignment, and we are to complete it. Sometimes we wonder what the next step will be, but God does not reveal it until we have done what he has

assigned. He sent Elijah to the court of Ahab to announce there would be no rain or dew these years except according to Elijah's word. Then the word of the Lord came to Elijah saying, "Get thee hence to the brook Cherith; there I have commanded the ravens to feed you. You can drink from the brook" (cf. 1 Kings 17:3-5). Elijah did not know where he was going until after he performed his mission to Ahab. Therefore, we work and wait, and the waiting is rewarded by the revelation of the next step when the present work is accomplished.

We wait in a spirit of being yielded to God. This is beautifully expressed for us in Psalm 32:8-9, "I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye. Be ye not as the horse, or as the mule, which has no understanding; whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle, lest they come near unto thee."

Wait in prayer and Bible reading. These are the doorway and the path by which God comes to us for everything, and by which we then go to him with everything. With open hands and hearts we can receive his mind, his will, his power, but not until we have come to him through his Word and his appointed way of prayer.

Wait in the Holy Spirit. I do not mean by this that you wait for a sudden inrush of the Holy Spirit's presence. We believe that the Scripture teaches that when we were saved and born again, the Holy Spirit came to take up his dwelling in our hearts. Therefore, we wait in quietness and confidence for him to make effective his promises. He is our counselor, our guide, and the source of our power; therefore, wait for the Holy Spirit.

The Rewards of Waiting

We should consider some of the blessings that come to those that wait upon the Lord, or on the Lord, or for the Lord.

First, they shall renew their strength, and with that strength, they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary; (and the climax) they shall walk and not faint.

There are times when we may mount up like eagles and run with speed, but these are not the usual ways of progress. The practice of walking expresses perhaps better than any other the daily life of God's child. Walking is steady, continuous, and it brings us, not rapidly perhaps, but at last, to the desired thing. This is a great blessing that comes to those who wait for the Lord.

Another blessing is the recognition that it is God who worketh in us both to will and to work for his good pleasure. He inspires us with his ideas, and then takes us up and performs the task with us and through us. He does it because of his enjoyment, "for his good pleasure." Thus, we see God using us, and this is indeed a blessing that comes only to those who wait for the Lord.

We are told that they that wait for the Lord shall not be ashamed. They shall not be confounded nor confused. When the work is done, there are no regrets and there is no desire to try to do it over another way. We have been assured that this is God's way, and we rest in that confidence. Others do not experience this sense of deep abiding satisfaction.

In Psalm 40 is a cluster of these blessings. Let us look at them for a moment. David says, "I waited patiently for the Lord" (v. 1). The first blessing is that God inclined unto David and heard his cry. This is a blessing beyond description or evaluation, that the eternal God inclines toward us, listens to us, and hears our cry. Again, David says, "He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay" (v. 2). This could, of course, refer to his becoming a child of God, but not necessarily. Many times God's children sidestep after their conversion, as Pilgrim did in *Pilgrim's Progress*, and find

themselves in the miry clay or in Doubting Castle. "He brought me up out of an horrible pit."

David said another blessing was that he "set my feet upon the rock, and established my goings" (v. 2). God kept him steady, and he keeps us steady.

He put a new song in David's mouth, a song of joy, a song of victory, even praise unto God. These are the blessings, as David gave them to us, that come from waiting for the Lord.

But there is still another blessing and this is the one that gives us deepest joy and satisfaction. When people see what God has done for us because we wait upon him, David says, "Many shall see it, and fear, and shall trust in the Lord" (v. 3). By what they see in us they are convinced of the Lord and turn and put their trust also in him.

Out of our waiting upon the Lord, waiting for the Lord, there grows within our hearts a realization of his abiding presence. We become as those who dwell in the secret place of the most High and abide under the shadow of the Almighty. Fellowship with God can be unceasing if we so will it in our hearts. Walking before him, we are waiting for him. He does not fail us, but works his mighty will in us, by us, and through us, to his glory for the ongoing of his kingdom.

13. My Times Are in Thy Hand

Psalm 31 seems to be a record of a time of trouble in the life of King David. He begins with a confident note, "In thee, O Lord, do I put my trust." But his declaration does not rid him of the oppressive feelings which are upon him, and he lifts up his voice in prayer. He pleads for help and then says to God, "Thou art my rock and fortress" (v. 3). And further, "Pull me out of the net that they have laid privily for me: for thou art my strength. Into thine hand I commit my spirit: thou hast redeemed me, O Lord God of truth" (vv. 4-5).

He swings back and forth between confident trust and a doubtful kind of prayer; but he arrives at a solid footing and declares boldly, "But I trusted in thee, O Lord; I said, Thou art my -God. My times are in thy hand" (vv. 14-15).

All of us experience this cycle of trouble and trust. Troubles come upon us, and we are discouraged and defeated. Our path is darkened by clouds of doubt. We cry unto the Lord in our troubles. We pray fitfully but not trustingly. Unexpectedly the clouds break, and a brilliant shaft of light falls upon us. In that light we rejoice for a moment; but the clouds close in, and again we seem to lose our joy and our trust. Present troubles seem more real than the God who seems to be far off.

Peter had this type of experience one early morning on the Sea of Galilee. Jesus came walking on the sea in the fourth watch of the night. The disciples saw him come and in fear cried out. But he said to them, "It is I, be not afraid." Peter said, "Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water. And he said, Come" (Matt. 14:28-29).

Peter stepped over the side of the boat onto the water and walked toward Jesus, but the record says that when he saw the boisterous wind and waves he began to sink. The wind and the waves were more real to Peter than the Lord who was giving him power to walk on the waters. He got his eyes off the Lord and on to his present troubles and began to sink.

And so do we. We swing back and forth from confident faith that gives joy and peace to disturbing doubt. Our trust is weakened, and we are unhappy and walk in the shadows. The 31st Psalm well illustrates our confusion. The chapter is a mixture of "I believe" and "O Lord, help me." David received assurance in his heart, then continued to pray and prayed himself out of faith.

But in verses 14 and 15 he arrived at a solid, broad place where he stood still and said, "But I trusted in thee, O Lord: I said, Thou art my God. My times are in thy hand."

A Fact Worth Knowing

"My times are in thy hand!" This is a fact. A fact is something that has actual existence. God is a fact; I am a fact. That my times are in God's hand is a fact whether I realize and experience it or not. Blessed is the man that discovers this fact and lives in the reality of it from day to day.

This is one of the great teachings of the Scriptures. Jesus imparted this great thought again and again in his teaching and in his own practice.

He practiced it in his replies to Satan in the time of temptation. Satan challenged him to use his divine power for

his own ends; but Jesus declared his confidence that God would care for him. "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Matt. 4:4).

He declared it in his teachings when he pointed to the sparrow and said, "And one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father" (10:29). Again, he said, "The very hairs of your head are all numbered" (10:30). The Heavenly Father has concern for the very least interest of our lives.

That "my times are in thy hand" is the most solid reality. It is a great rock of divine truth. We can find great encouragement in its shelter, or we can break ourselves against it. The fact stands unmoved, and trusting people discover its value in every experience of life. It is not theory except to the theorizers. To men who walk with God, no fact is more substantial and solid. So come what may, my times are in God's hands. This I know to be a fact. God is trustworthy and dependable; I commit myself to his ways and discover that he has been holding my ways all the time.

Let me illustrate from personal experience. In the summer of 1925 our church excluded a man for heresy and immorality. This man came to the church and defiantly demanded that we restore him to fellowship and grant him a letter. We refused to do this. He had already done this with one church. They had given him a letter, and on that letter he had joined our church.

When the church refused his request, he threatened to sue the church. Personally, I did not think that he would create a situation that we could not handle, so I remained calm. Several times he called and made threats.

Then I received a severe jolt. I came home one afternoon and my wife asked, "Have you seen the evening paper?" I had not; she handed it to me. Spread across the top of the front

page in black headlines were these words, "Baptist Pastor Sued for \$50,000." This was a totally different matter now. I was being sued and not the church. I was shaken and frightened and I turned to the Lord with strong cryings and perhaps some tears. After three days of praying as I went about my work, God laid his word in my heart. I had memorized a verse on the day of my eighth birthday. Now the Lord made this my strong tower. It was the word of the Lord in Joshua 1:5, "There shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life: as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee: I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee." By this passage God gave me peace. Then he sent two fine attorneys (one a member of my church, the other whom it was later my privilege to lead to the Lord and into our church). We put ourselves in the hands of the Lord and God gave the victory.

If we do not do this, we continue in distress and agony. God would speak to us and sustain us if we would but let him.

So, I say that this is a fact that becomes real to us as we exercise faith in God. Faith in God may be defined simply as "taking God at his word." In other words, whatever God speaks to our hearts out of the Scriptures, we are to rest upon. We have no other basis of faith. You may look at the stars and believe there is a Creator, but you have nothing to stand upon in such a belief. You may look at a tornado and believe in the might and power of the Creator, but still you have no faith that sustains and helps. But, when you sit down with open heart and listen to God's word, "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want," you have something from God, and you begin to exercise faith in God through what he has said.

Now this fact, "My times are in thy hand," is knowable to everyone who exercises faith in God. This fact operates in the spiritual and material worlds, and experience demonstrates its validity.

We have heard it said, "Seeing is believing," and if that is true anywhere, it is in the recognition and acceptance of this divine statement, "My times are in thy hand."

On every hand we find people who prove by their works and their character the truth of this glorious statement. They manifest hearts full of peace. Around them is a joyous, radiant atmosphere. They impress us with a sense of God.

In Matthew 6:19-33 Jesus frankly says, do not lay up treasures for yourself on this earth; make heaven your bank. Don't have a double eye, an eye for God's kingdom and an eye for money. It won't work. What seems light will prove to be darkness. You cannot serve God and money. Then he says, don't worry about what you wear nor what you drink. Don't worry about food; God takes care of the birds, God clothes the lilies. Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness and all things will be provided.

This is the meaning of the statement, "My times are in thy hand." Jesus declared that God is a good Father, better than the best earthly father; and, believing in God and in his blessed Son, we say amen to what Jesus has said.

Therefore this teaching, "My times are in thy hand," is a fact to be acknowledged, believed, received, walked in, lived, experienced to the utmost by every child of God.

Faith and Fact

In relation to this fact, faith cannot be overemphasized. We do not associate facts with faith as much as we ought, but each of us is a fact; and every day we manifest our faith in one another. This manifestation of faith proves that we rest faith upon fact and must do so. This matter of our times being in God's hands is a "faith fact."

Every true believer agrees that this is an abiding fact. If it is a fact, it is true. But not every believer rests in this fact, or in God the author of it.

If God is the God that the Bible teaches, then this is a fact that is most real. We do not discover it or come to know it by reason, but by faith. Many things that seem unreasonable are to the man of faith reasonable and sensible.

No man who will not step out upon the promise involved can know and experience the reality of God in this particular relationship. Once we have begun to step, the fact and God himself begin to appear to the mind and heart. Somebody has said that faith is the highest form of knowledge. The man who walks by faith from day to day will earnestly answer, "Amen."

Faith in the heart operates through obedience in works. Every act of obedience opens up further light and knowledge. Isn't this what Jesus meant when he said, "He that willeth to do his will shall know" (cf. John 7:17). Faith asks us to obey and to move forth under sealed orders. Without obedience to the requirements of faith, the light dies and faith grows dim.

Faith takes God at his word, for faith comes by hearing the Word of God. God's Word is his will and his will covers all "my times."

I do not have to plan my life. I seek God's plans. A line of a song says, "I place my life in the hands of God." And a line from a chorus says, "I take hands off my life." God has a plan for each of us. God's plan is his will. His will is in his hand and that means that my times must unfold his will.

The Meaning of Our Times

Let us deal now with this phrase, "my times." What are my times and yours? They are the little things and the big things that make up our lives from day to day.

First, "my daily routine." From the time I awake in the morning until I close my eyes in sleep at night, the things in these hours make up my times.

I believe that God is concerned about the minutes as well as

the days. Therefore, he is concerned that I get up early enough to be alone with him in his Word and in prayer. There has never been a better example of this than our Lord Jesus Christ. Mark 1:35 says, "And in the morning, rising up a great while before day, he went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed." If this part of the day is not in God's hand, then the rest of it may be out of his hand also. Whether it be five o'clock in the morning or eight, one must take time to retire with God for strength, for light, for guidance, and for the sense of his presence.

Another thing that is in God's hands, as well as in mine, is my bodily health and strength. Physical fitness is my concern insofar as I fulfil the conditions which God has laid down for health and strength. When I have fulfilled those conditions, I have placed the matter in God's hands or have recognized that it is there. I myself find great help in Exodus 15:26, "If thou wilt diligently hearken to the voice of the Lord thy God, and wilt do that which is right in his sight, and wilt give ear to his commandments, and keep all his statutes, I will put none of these diseases upon thee, which I have brought upon the Egyptians: for I am the Lord that healeth thee."

According to some interpreters, this last statement, "the Lord that healeth thee," is a compound name of Jehovah—*Jehovah Rapha*—which means "Jehovah the healer."

That means that I can claim for myself Psalm 27:1, "The Lord is . . . the strength of my life." And Psalm 103:5, "Who satisfieth thy mouth with good things; so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle's." Also this word from Isaiah 40:31, "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength."

My work times are in his hand—what I am to do, where I am to do it, how it is to be done, and the power for its accomplishment. All this is in his hand, and confidently I receive it.

My "finance times" are in his hand. I have already indicated

the teaching of Jesus in Matthew 6:19-33. Look at the last verse of that passage, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." That ought to care for every person's heart and mind in relation to his finances. God is concerned about our finances. I am one who receives both the Old and the New Testaments as the Word of God. I find in the Old Testament, expressions that indicate that God is deeply concerned about a man's finances. In Deuteronomy 8:18 God says to Moses, "Thou shalt remember the Lord thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant."

Again, in Proverbs 3:9-10, "Honour the Lord with thy substance, and with the firstfruits of all thine increase: so shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine."

And in no place is God's concern about our personal finances more clearly expressed than in Malachi 3:10-12. Here he is definite, "Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it." This in itself is an all-sufficient argument and needs no support from any man. God is concerned about my "finance times." If I am obedient to him, I can claim all of his promise concerning his blessings.

Another area of life which we can call "my times" is in relation to the children whom God has given us. Psalm 127:3 says, "Lo, children are an heritage of the Lord: and the fruit of the womb is his reward. As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man; so are children of the youth. Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them: they shall not be ashamed, but they shall speak with the enemies in the gate."

Our chief concern as parents is the total welfare of our

children. All of us want for them the very best, and all of us want them to be the very best. There are some problems concerning children that we can handle; others are beyond us, and we have to learn to commit ourselves and our children to the Lord in his promise. The promise that has sustained us in our "times" is Isaiah 54:13, "And all thy children shall be taught of the Lord; and great shall be the peace of thy children." It is the first part of that verse that constitutes the dependence on the Lord that every parent should feel. If we will let him, the Lord will teach where we cannot even draw near. We sing a song, "He has never broken any promise spoken," and I can testify that the Lord has kept his promise in relation to our children and our grandchildren.

As leaders in God's work, we say, "my times"—that is, "my times" as a worker for the Lord—are in God's hands. His work, his mission, his program for every church must be sought out and received. Too much of the work we undertake is originated by ourselves, and having worked out the plans, we bring them and lay them before God and ask him to bless our plans. Should we not rather seek from him what he has planned, and the work he wants us to do? As he reveals it to us, his blessing will accompany it. Such a resting in his planning will soon convince us of the truth of the words of the prophet in Zechariah 4:6, "This is the word of the Lord. . . . Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord of hosts."

Blessings Delivered

This fact—"my times are in thy hand"—when believed, received, depended upon, brings blessed results. Psalm 37:5 says, "Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him, and he shall bring it to pass."

Committing our ways unto the Lord is recognizing that our times are in his hand. When we live day by day in such a com-

mittal, we receive specific blessings that are great and enduring.

One of these blessings is found in that word "peace." Peace is heart rest. It is not the absence of storms and difficulties, trials and heartaches; it is the quietness of the soul in the midst of all these things as it looks upon the face of the Lord and knows that he holds our times.

Another of the blessings is that, created within us, is an artesian fountain of joy springing up continually and flowing out to bless everybody around.

A third blessing is that, in time, we discover that God has enabled us to grow and to develop an overcoming faith—faith that removes mountains and faith that becomes a channel of blessing to the whole world.

We learn to walk firmly and steadily in the Holy Spirit and thereby show forth a quiet, convincing, satisfying testimony to our Heavenly Father's good care of us. This testimony becomes a converting testimony to men who do not know God. David expresses this well in Psalm 40:

I waited patiently for the Lord; and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry. He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings. And he hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God; many shall see it, and fear, and shall trust in the Lord (vv. 1-3).

When we believe, receive, and live by this truth, "my times are in thy hand," we of necessity live in dependence upon God and receive all of God's blessings.

ALWAYS IN PRAYER

E. F. Hallock, pastor emeritus of First Baptist Church, Norman, Oklahoma

To pray in the name of Jesus is to be so attached to him, so united to him that his thoughts become my thoughts; his desires become my desires; his life becomes my life; his nature becomes my nature; his prayers are my prayers and my prayers are his prayers. These inspirational messages express the necessity, joy, and fruitfulness of prayer in each Christian's life. They will help readers to pray, and pray more understandingly, in greater faith.



08-ARZ-270